

The Environmental Imagination

Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the
Formation of American Culture

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It has been the distinctive mission of environmental nonfiction from Bartram to Thoreau to Austin and beyond to call this visible but overlooked American otherworld into being in such a way as to establish its integrity and standing apart from any irreducible lingering element of self-interest on the part of its discoverers.

The “transparent eyeball” state Austin defines can easily revert to the empire of the eye, with its alien agendas, personal or political. But the visionary state also and just as easily can lead one, as it did her, to look at the night sky and think: “Of no account you who lie out there watching, nor the lean coyote that stands off in the scrub from you and howls and howls” (*LLR* 17). Vision can correlate not with dominance but with receptivity, and knowledge with ecocentrism.

Contemporary literary theory, however, makes it hard to see this side of the story—and thus makes the prospect of environmental reorientation, of awakening from the metropolitan dream, look more unlikely than it needs to be. Having complicated the theory of pastoral ideology, we must now confront squarely a more fundamental problem posed by literary theory: its skepticism about how texts can purport to represent environments in the first place when, after all, a text is obviously one thing and the world another.

 CHAPTER THREE

Representing the Environment



The profound kinship of language with the world was thus dissolved . . . Things and words were to be separated from one another . . . Discourse was still to have the task of speaking that which is, but it was no longer to be anything more than what it said.

—Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

That everything we say is false because everything we say falls short of being everything that could be said is an adolescent sort of error.

—Hilary Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*

I think of two landscapes—one outside the self, the other within. The external landscape is the one we see—not only the line and color of the land and its shading at different times of the day, but also its plants and animals in season, its weather, its geology, the record of its climate and evolution . . . One learns a landscape finally not by knowing the name or identity of everything in it, but by perceiving the relationships in it—like that between the sparrow and the twig . . .

The second landscape I think of is an interior one, a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape . . . the speculations, intuitions, and formal ideas we refer to as “mind” are a set of relationships in the interior landscape with purpose and order . . . The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape; the shape of the individual is affected by land as it is by genes.

—Barry Lopez, “Landscape and Narrative”

IDEOLOGY, the subject of Chapters 1–2, is after all only one of several filters through which literature sifts the environments it purports to represent. These filters begin with the human sensory apparatus itself, which responds much more sensitively for example at the level of sight than of smell and even at the visual level is highly selective: we perceive discrete objects better than objects in relation, and large objects much better than the average life-form (about the size of a small insect).¹ For these reasons our reconstructions of environment cannot be other than skewed and partial. Even if this were not so, even if human perception could perfectly register environmental stimuli, literature could not. Even when it professes the contrary, art removes itself from nature. Physical texts derive from dead plants. Even “imagistic” symbols like certain Chinese characters or visual configurations pronounced onomatopoeically are signs far more abstract than animal tracks on snow. Writing and reading are acts usually performed indoors, unachievable without long shifts of attention away from the natural environment. There is a crotchety justice to a late Victorian complaint about natural history essays: “Who would give a tinker’s dam for a description of a sunset that *he* hadn’t seen? Damn it, it’s like kissing a pretty girl by proxy.”²

Yet from another point of view the emphasis on disjunction between text and world seems overblown. To most lay readers, nothing seems more obvious than the proposition that literature of a descriptive cast, be it “fictional” or “nonfictional,” portrays “reality,” even if imperfectly. John Stuart Mill, who found solace in Wordsworth’s compelling rendition of physical nature, would have been astonished by the stinginess of the modern argument that Wordsworth reckoned nature as at best a convenience and at worst an impediment to the imagination. Most amateur Thoreauvians would find equally strange the claim that in Thoreau’s *Journal* “when the mind sees nature what it sees is its difference from nature,” a million-word paper trail of unfulfilled desire.³ In contemporary literary theory, however, the capacity of literary writers to render a faithful mimesis of the object world is reckoned indifferent at best, and their interest in doing so is thought to be a secondary concern.⁴

One basis for this divergence between commonsensical and specialized wisdom may be that the modern understanding of how environmental representation works has been derived from the study of the fictive genres rather than nonfiction. The consequence of this is suggested by the common omnibus term used for designating the sphere of

the nonhuman environment in literary works: setting. It deprecates what it denotes, implying that the physical environment serves for artistic purposes merely as backdrop, ancillary to the main event. The most ambitious monograph on place in literature criticizes Thomas Hardy’s evocation of Egdon heath (which “almost puts his work into the kind of place-saturated fiction which is expressly devoted to the assault upon a mountain”) and commends by contrast the Parisian chapters of Henry James’s *Ambassadors* as containing “the barest minimum of detail and the maximum of personal reflection on these details.”⁵ In “good” writing, then, it would seem that the biota has only a bit part. If we map literary history from this angle of vision, we reinforce the impression that attentive representation of environmental detail is of minor importance even in writing where the environment figures importantly as an issue. In American literature, the main canonical forms of environmental writing are the wilderness romance and the lyric meditation on the luminous natural image or scene. Cooper’s *Deerslayer*, Faulkner’s “Bear,” Bryant’s poem “To the Fringed Gentian,” Whitman’s “Out of the Cradle,” Robert Frost’s “Design”—of such is the core of these traditions comprised. It is easy to persuade oneself on the basis of the average critical discussion of these works that the literary naturescape exists for its formal or symbolic or ideological properties rather than as a place of literal reference or as an object of retrieval or contemplation for its own sake. It is unthinkable that Bryant could have sought to immerse himself in the natural history of the gentian, or Frost in observing spiders. And so professors of literature, whatever their behavior in ordinary life, easily become anti-environmentalists in their professional practice.

Yet the explanation cannot simply be that literature specialists mostly study novels and poems, for during the past two decades we have ranged freely across the human sciences, subjecting ethnography and phenomenology and even scientific monographs to literary analysis almost as readily as sonnets and short stories. Today, as Carolyn Porter has said, “we confront a virtually horizonless discursive field in which . . . the traditional boundaries between the literary and the extraliterary have faded.”⁶ No doubt we have derived our critical skepticism or disdain for the notion that literature does or can represent physical reality from the idea of writing as construct, whether this idea takes the form of the old-fashioned formalist theory of the literary work as artifact or the contemporary theory of writing as discourse. Thus, during the very half-

century since Aldo Leopold, as environmental writing in America has unprecedentedly thriven, literary theory has been making the idea of a literature devoted to recuperating the factual environment seem quaintly untheoretical. All major strains of contemporary literary theory have marginalized literature's referential dimension by privileging structure, text(uality), ideology, or some other conceptual matrix that defines the space discourse occupies apart from factual "reality," as the epigraph from Foucault imagines having been done once and for all during the classical era. New critical formalism did so by insisting that the artifact was its own world, a heterocosm. Structuralism and poststructuralism broke down the barrier between literary and nonliterary, not however to rejoin literary discourse to the world but to conflate all verbal artifacts within a more spacious domain of textuality. Quarreling with this unworldliness, Marxist and Marxoid (for example, Foucaultian) models of analysis during the 1980s combined with poststructuralism in Anglo-America to generate the so-called new historicism, which set text within context. But it did so in terms of the text's status as a species of cultural production or ideological work. In this type of formulation, literature's appropriation of the world in the service of some social allegiance or commitment seemed to render merely epiphenomenal the responsiveness of literature to the natural world either in its self-existence as an assemblage or plenum or in the form of a gestalt that can impress itself on the mind or text in the fundamental and binding way that the epigraph from Lopez envisages. It seems that literature is simply not thought to have the power to do this, that such power it might have is thought to have been overridden by the power of imagination, textuality, and culture over the malleable, plastic world that it bends to its will. Whitman, in "Song of Myself," may insist that "I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass," but there is no grass, no summer, no loafer (despite the title-page illustration done from a photograph of Whitman himself). No, there is only an image, a symbol, a projection, a persona, a vestige or democratic deformation of aristocratic pastoral (compare Thomas Gray's "disporting on the margent green"), a contortion of heptameter.

The historicist movement that succeeded poststructuralism as the dominant theoretical paradigm of literary studies during the 1980s attached greater importance than its formalist and structuralist predecessors to art's mimetic function and might thus seem to be more environment-responsive. Yet it turns out to interpose obstacles no less daunting

to making the case for representation in the affirmative sense. The recent dismantling of nineteenth-century realism is instructive here.⁷ Within a decade it has become almost hackneyed to point out that so-called realism, far from being a transparent rendering, is a highly stylized ideological or psychohistorical artifact that we have sloppily agreed to call realistic. The powerful rereading by art historian Michael Fried of the high point of realism in American painting, Thomas Eakins's *Gross Clinic*, is a striking example of the new orthodoxy in formation. Although Fried by no means denies the painting's graphic fidelity to documentary detail (the wincing observers, the blood on the scalpel, the almost violent dominance of the surgeon over the patient and the operating room), he argues that the painting is much more fundamentally shaped by intertextual and psychobiographical forces. The referent, the text-clinic correspondence itself, seems almost epiphenomenal.⁸

Ironically, during the same period that "realism" has been deconstructed, historians and social scientists have often drawn on realistic fiction for evidentiary support. One cultural geographer, for example, praises John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* as providing "focus for instruction in migration, settlement forms, economic systems, cultural dualism, agricultural land use patterns, transportation technology and social change," as well as "a window on geographic phenomena broadly ranging from mental maps to economic infrastructures."⁹

And why not? I am not the first to wonder whether the discrediting of realism as an attempted transparency has gone too far. George Levine, for one, urges that "the dominant distaste for anything that smacks of the empirical" within the human sciences "needs to be overcome, just as the scientists' tendency to dismiss theory and antirealism must be." Levine contends that "the discriminations that have been obliterated between objectivity and subjectivity, scientific and literary discourse, history and fiction, are in effect, still operative" and that they "need to be recuperated, if modified."¹⁰ His statement about differences in representational mode between disciplines I would apply to the literary field itself. There is a mimetic difference hard to specify but uncontroversial to posit between the Chicago of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* and the places of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*, a difference also between Calvino's cities and the cities of Marco Polo's original *Travels*. There is a difference between the relatively "uncomposed" western photographs of Timothy O'Sullivan and nineteenth-century landscape photographs of a more "luminist" persua-

sion like those by Thomas Moran.¹¹ In the theory—or countermyth—of representation that I develop in this chapter, these differences are not just symptoms of Dreiser’s petit-bourgeois romance of commodities or Calvino’s avant-gardist critique (or perhaps reflection) of the more abstract commodifications of contemporary globalized capitalism.¹² My account of the reality of these fictional realities does not deny that they can profitably be so read but focuses on the recuperation of natural objects and the relation between outer and inner landscapes as primary projects.

The Dream of Accuracy

Let us start by returning to the long-lost world of nineteenth-century realism, which actually has since been twice displaced. (Initially it was displaced by high modernism, which in turn supplied the intellectual foundations of the formalist phase of Anglo-American literary theory.) To that end, I invoke a quaint essay by the late nineteenth-century essayist, naturalist, and critic John Burroughs, “Nature and the Poets.” Burroughs designed this essay as an addendum to an earlier piece in which he credited the true poet with greater insight into nature than naturalists have, because the poet “carries her open secrets in his heart.” Without retracting this, Burroughs now seeks to expose poetry’s lapses of accuracy, particularly those of “minor” poets, for Burroughs believes that “the greater the poet, the more correct and truthful will be his specifications.” Thus Burroughs credits Emerson with knowing “the New England fields and woods, as few poets do,” and Bryant slightly less so, while censuring an obscure poet from Kansas for imagining yews and nightingales there. As he conducts his tour of poetic landscapes, Burroughs piles up a sometimes incredibly picky catalog of ornithological and botanical lapses committed for the sake of melodic or imagistic euphony. Take for instance his strictures on Bryant’s lines

The mother bird hath broken for her brood
Their prison shells, or shoved them from the nest,
Plumed for their earliest flight.

“It is not a fact,” complains Burroughs, “that the mother bird aids her offspring in escaping from the shell. The young of all birds are armed with a small temporary horn or protuberance upon the upper mandible,

and they are so placed in the shell that this point is in immediate contact with its inner surface; as soon as they are fully developed and begin to struggle to free themselves, the horny growth ‘pips’ the shell . . . To help the young bird forth would insure its speedy death. It is not true, either, that the parent shoves its young from the nest when they are fully fledged, except possibly in the case of some of the swallows and of the eagle.”¹³

This kind of commentary can cause a modern reader’s eyes to glass over in a hurry and tempt one to explain the fussiness as an obtuse refusal to distinguish one discourse from another. Burroughs, to give him credit, remains fully aware that there is a difference, stressing at the end of his essay that the poet’s proper role is not merely to chronicle nature but “to see it subjectively.”¹⁴ Mere objectivity, or scientific detachment, did not interest him; he wanted to make facticity regulate poetic license, not oppose it. His motto was “the beautiful, not *over* but *through* the true.”¹⁵ But from the standpoint of any prevailing aesthetic standard before or after, his was an extreme literalism. In later years, he pushed it even farther, instigating the “nature fakers” controversy, in which he and others decried the overuse of fantasy elements in contemporary animal stories.¹⁶

The fact that this teapot tempest started in America’s then leading journal of literary opinion, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and effervesced to the point that even President Theodore Roosevelt became involved shows how much hotter an issue mimetic fidelity to the known facts of natural history was a century ago than now. In my Harvard University Library copy of Burroughs’s “Nature and the Poets” is an ancient-looking graffito quibbling with the remark “the dandelion blooms occasionally throughout the whole summer”; the word “occasionally” is underlined and in the margin is written “very often.”¹⁷ That is how even some highbrow reviewers challenged Burroughs’s essay when it appeared in article form in the late 1870s: not by questioning whether it was ludicrously literal-minded but by finding fault with the accuracy of Burroughs’s own observations.¹⁸

It is so easy to laugh at such punctiliousness today that it is all the more important as a test of our contrary assumptions to take Burroughs seriously as expounding an aspect of authorial proficiency and reading competence that in our time has been banished to the subconscious: not that it has disappeared altogether, but that, being disreputable, it lacks voice and remains in the same limbo position that Charles Taylor ascribes to the “ethics of inarticulacy” in moral thought.¹⁹ We live in a time when it is more fashionable for art to replicate constructed objects (electric

plugs, pop bottles, hot water bags) than sedate landscapes (or cityscapes) done to scale; but as we congratulate ourselves on outgrowing the mimetic illusion by making it the playful instrument of our will, the repressed overtakes us at every turn. Perhaps we encounter some untrained student or family member, a zestful amateur novel reader, who cannot avoid thinking that Melville was truly interested in whaling lore. Perhaps we recall our own excitement, before we became properly socialized, at Hardy bringing an English heath "to life," or Dickens the street scenes of London, or Richard Wright the world of a Chicago ghetto, or Edith Wharton the equally suffocating refinements of old-fashioned New York society. The willingness to admit that thick description of the external world can at least sometimes be a strong interest for writers and for readers, even when it also serves ulterior purposes, is particularly crucial in the case of the environmental text. Nonfictional nature representation, especially, hinges on its ability to convince us that it is more responsive to the physical world's nuances than most people are, selective though that response may still be. To give a sufficiently generous account of literature's environmental sensitivity, we need to find a way of conceiving the literal level that will neither peremptorily subordinate it nor gloss over its astigmatism.²⁰

Burroughs was not the first or most articulate spokesperson for the now disreputable aesthetic of classical realism. In the English-speaking world, its great fomentor was unquestionably John Ruskin, whose standards for the modern landscape painter were higher than Burroughs's standards for the nature poet. Aesthetic excellence, for Ruskin, was based on "*perfect* knowledge" of the properties of the object. Factual accuracy per se was not the artist's highest end for Ruskin, any more than for Burroughs, and on that account Ruskin followed the convention of his day by condescending to Dutch landscape painting. But he held "the representation of facts" to be "the foundation of all art," insisting that "nothing can atone for the want of truth, not the most brilliant imagination." Indeed, Ruskin, like Burroughs after him, went so far as to declare that "material truth is indeed a perfect test of the relative rank of painters, though it does not in itself constitute that rank."²¹

What most strikes me about Ruskin's stance in *Modern Painters* are not his categorical assertions, however, but his extraordinarily minute strictures on painterly rendering of all characteristic landscape items: how

branches and twigs should ramify, how rocks should be differentiated, and so on. One unfortunate tree in a landscape by Nicolas Poussin elicits this verdict: "It has no bark, no roughness nor character of stem; its boughs do not grow out of each other, but are stuck into each other; they ramify without diminishing, diminish without ramifying, are terminated by no complicated sprays, have their leaves tied to their ends, like the heads of Dutch brooms; and finally, and chiefly, they are evidently not made of wood, but of some soft elastic substance, which the wind can stretch out as it pleases, for there is not a vestige of an angle in any one of them."²² Here we see the same passion for ferreting out small errors that we saw in Burroughs, far more elegantly expressed, with a magisterial comprehensiveness that leaves one in awe of Ruskin's microscopic vision. The vehemence and subtlety with which he effected a quantum leap in the rigor of realist aesthetics carried, at least for some readers, the force of a revelation: he showed them that they had never looked at a tree before, in any true sense of looking. The experience of confronting Ruskin for the first time must have been comparable to the experience of first realizing that the generic use of the masculine pronoun might be ideologically loaded, or that *Heart of Darkness* perpetuates the imperial order as staunchly as it critiques it. Precisely such a reader was the young George Eliot, just then on the verge of beginning her career as the greatest of all Victorian realists. In a review of the third volume of *Modern Painters*, she praised Ruskin's "doctrine that all truth and beauty are to be attained by a humble and faithful study of nature, and not by substituting vague forms . . . in place of definite, substantial reality. The thorough acceptance of this doctrine," Eliot affirmed, "would remould our life; and he who teaches its application to any one department of human activity with such power as Mr. Ruskin's, is a prophet for his generation."²³

Nonfictional Aesthetics: Dual Accountability

The pertinence of this mentality to the legitimation of environmental nonfiction is even more obvious than its pertinence to the realistic novel. By demanding that imaginary gardens have real toads in them, it makes discourse accountable to the object-world and thereby destabilizes the generic hierarchy of fictive over nonfictive, rendering the boundary porous to the point that artifacts appear arranged along a continuum of

facticity, the fictive judged in the first instance according to its fidelity to the factual rather than vice versa. In this conceptual universe, the art of discovery is valorized above the art of fabulation. Because it inevitably goes too far, this aesthetic is vulnerable to the Wildean challenge (life imitates art) that is the precursor of all modernist claims that discourse overrides mimesis: the world is only a small part of me, as e.e. cummings is said to have said. From *that* position, nonfiction becomes subsumed by poesis, textuality, ideology, the unconscious. Clearly the claims of realism merit reviving not in negation of these myths but in counterpoise, so as to enable one to reimagine textual representations as having a dual accountability to matter and to discursive mentation. I certainly would not argue that classical realism is the only or even the best way of restoring the object-world for art, for imagination, and for human life; indeed, some of the most environmentally responsive writers have been emphatic on the other side of the issue. Leslie Marmon Silko, for example, insists that “a ‘lifelike’ rendering of an elk is too restrictive,” offering no more than the external particularity of a single creature.²⁴ The value of classical realism as a test case is that it points up what contemporary representation theory most vigorously suppresses.

What I mean by “dual accountability” can be illustrated by a passage from Barry Lopez’s *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (1986), which as the book’s subtitle suggests is an environmental text distinguished for its exceptional sensitivity to the limits of objective representation when the writer is placed in a totally unfamiliar setting. Lopez ponders the question of how bears stalk seals:

One of the most persistent of bear legends—that they cover their dark noses with a paw or a piece of snow when they are stalking a seal—may have originated with Eskimos, but the thought has the flavor of invention about it. At a distance of 1000 yards, the argument goes, you can barely distinguish a polar bear on the sea ice, but you can clearly see its black nose. How could a seal not notice it? It’s possible that it does—and that is exactly what the bear intends. To a seal, a polar bear approaching in a straight line over flat ice, its lowered forequarters sliding along ahead of its hindquarters, would show very little body movement—the pushing motion of the rear legs does not break the outline of the hips. If the seal focuses on the dark

nose, the bear’s shape falls into vague relief against the surrounding ice. And at that distance the nose looks like another seal resting on the ice. Because of an optical phenomenon, the size of the bear’s nose does not begin to fill more of the seal’s image of that part of the sea ice until the bear is almost on top of the seal. And at that point the bear rises and bounds toward it.

It is possible the bear goes down on its forequarters only to keep the horizon from showing up between its legs; but it is also possible it wants its dark nose down there on the ice where it looks like a seal.

“Without direct evidence,” Lopez adds, “without setting up an experiment, one can only speculate.” But even when that is done, “nothing—no laboratory result or field-camp speculation—can replace the rich, complex texture, the credibility, of something that takes place ‘out there.’”²⁵

The passage centers on two invented narratives, invented in the dual sense of fabricated and discovered: stories humanly made up but generated to explain an empirical fact, that the seal does not notice the bear. Lopez knows his theory is a fiction, and he defers to the authority of science; but the ultimate authority, to which both laboratory result and field-camp explanation must appeal, is what’s “out there.” The narrative of seal (mis)perception that Lopez makes up is a theory that might prove to be either fantasy or fact, in which respect it resembles, without equaling, a scientific hypothesis rigorously derived from laboratory data. Both must finally satisfy the mind *and* the ethological facts, which in both instances may refute them.

The notion of “dual accountability” is still vague. One can distinguish at least four levels of reference in literary discourse: to use Linda Hutcheon’s taxonomy, the intratextual, the intertextual (the world of other texts), the autorepresentational (the text figured as a text), and the outer mimetic (the world outside the text).²⁶ All come into play here: the concern to establish narrative coherence, to signal participation of this story in a world of texts (the fable of the bear covering its nose), to acknowledge that the narrative may have created its own world, and to make the narrative faithful to the world. What differentiates Lopez’s “nonfiction” from most “fiction” is not that he blocks out the first three (all of which point to relations within the domain of textuality), but that he gives more weight to the last, granting it a theoretical veto over the others.

This chapter's third epigraph, from an essay of the same period, amplifies Lopez's notion of how imagination mediates between landscape and desire. The contours of human subjectivity, as he sees it, are molded by the configurations of the landscapes with which a person has been deeply associated. Subjectivity is not a mere function of landscape; but it is regulated somewhat by landscape, and as far as Lopez is concerned landscape is the more interesting variable. In short, Lopez remains accountable to the facticity in terms of which he invites his arctic images to be judged.

Lopez's notion of "outer mimesis" in environmental nonfiction seemingly boils down to this. Literature functions as science's less systematic but more versatile complement. Both seek to make understandable a puzzling world. To a greater degree than science, literature releases imagination's free play, though the play is not entirely free, since the imagination is regulated by encounters with the environment both personal and mediated through the unofficial folk wisdom to which one has been exposed. Thus regulated, the mind is at leisure to ramble among intriguing hypotheses, and it is not only permitted but expected to present theory as narrative or descriptive exposition rather than as argument. A certain lyricism is thus also encouraged: the adventures and vacillations of the persona on the way to whatever conclusion or inconclusion is reached. So too is a degree of ethical reflection; the assertion that "nothing . . . can replace" is as much a moral as a factual statement. But in the long run the author is committed to offering a model or scheme of the world (the bear-seal narrative, in this case) that we are invited to weigh according to our supposition or knowledge of its plausibility. Either intuition ("the thought has the flavor of invention about it") or field data can be invoked here. The narrative makes no pretense of total accuracy; it is a *theory* of natural history; but nature is the court of appeal. By Lopez's own account, we ought to value his bear-seal narrative less if it could be disproved, though we are also invited to value the free-swinging meditative process that leads up to it and accompanies it.

The foregoing stand as a short statement of the nonfictional aspiration. To get a firmer sense of the consequences of reading nonfictionally as opposed to fictionally, let us turn again to *Walden*. I want to juxtapose a passage from the *Walden* journal (16 July 1845) with the final version in the "Brute Neighbors" chapter of *Walden*. This is not Thoreau at his

most exciting, but it would be hard to select a more useful juxtaposition for present purposes.

Here is one has had her nest under my house, and came when I took my luncheon to pick the crumbs at my feet. It had never seen the race of man before, and so the sooner became familiar—It ran over my shoes and up my pantaloons inside clinging to my flesh with its sharp claws. It would run up the side of the room by short impulses like a squirrel—which resembles—coming between the house mouse and the former—Its belly is a little reddish and its ears a little longer. At length as I leaned my elbow on the bench it ran over my arm and round the paper which contained my dinner. And when I held it a piece of cheese it came and nibbled between my fingers and then cleaned its face and paws like a fly. (*PJ* 2: 162)

The mice which haunted my house were not the common ones, which are said to have been introduced into the country, but a wild native kind (*Mus leucopus*) not found in the village. I sent one to a distinguished naturalist, and it interested him much. When I was building, one of these had its nest underneath the house, and before I had laid the second floor, and swept out the shavings, would come out regularly at lunch time and pick up the crumbs at my feet. It probably had never seen a man before; and it soon became quite familiar, and would run over my shoes and up my clothes. It could readily ascend the sides of the room by short impulses, like a squirrel, which it resembled in its motions. At length, as I leaned with my elbow on the bench one day, it ran up my clothes, and along my sleeve, and round and round the paper which held my dinner, while I kept the latter close, and dodged and played at bo-peep with it; and when at last I held still a piece of cheese between my thumb and finger, it came and nibbled it, sitting in my hand, and afterward cleaned its face and paws, like a fly, and walked away. (*Wa* 225–226)

Through the several stages of composition, Thoreau developed both the "fictional" and the "nonfictional" elements. On the one hand, he stylized so as to stress the neighborliness of the little brute. For the first draft of *Walden*, Thoreau dropped "the race" of man and the reference to the mouse's "sharp claws"; he cut short the comparative mammalology; and

he added the cute touches of playing bo-peep with the mouse and having it eat out of his hand.²⁷ In the fifth draft, he dropped the phrase “clinging to the flesh,” so that in the published book the mouse simply scurries “up my clothes” without any sensation of discomfort.²⁸ These small changes ensured that the contact between mouse and man would seem more like an intimate, companionable interchange than the *Journal* version imagined it as being.

Yet even as Thoreau euphemized this passage he pushed it further toward documentary. Although he may not have intended “*Mus leucopus*” (a marginal note in his copy of the first edition) for the actual text of *Walden*, the first two sentences do explicitly frame the personal encounter as a natural history observation; with almost pedantic detail, he pins down the timing of it during the Walden experiment (when building, before laying the second story).²⁹ The vignette of Thoreau and the mouse is itself more personalized, but the passage as a whole does not focus so exclusively on an experience with one particular creature.

Read fictionally, the passage is conspicuous for its pastoral stylization, all the more so if we know its provenance. The infusion of natural history seems done in the interest of adding scientific authority to the author’s conversion of wild creature into domestic creature. A nonfictional reading would hardly deny Thoreau’s selective orchestration. But it would take fidelity to the evidence as a key ingredient in writing and editing; it would imagine the passage and its revisions as constructions from natural history and actual experience; and it would conclude that autobiography as such was less important than communicating, as Lopez puts it, a flavor of “the rich, complex texture, the credibility, of something that takes place ‘out there.’” Does the consolidation of Thoreau’s credentials as the Concord Pan really interest him so much here as the fact that a “wild” creature approached him so closely? Might the dramatization of intimacy have been warranted by the facts? Might not the *Journals*’ “nibbled between my fingers” suggest that Thoreau did in fact hold it in hand? Might not Thoreau’s passion for accuracy have been as important as his need to pastoralize?

A fictionalist reading tends to presuppose that the persona is the main subject, that selectivity is suppression, that represented detail is symbolic, that environmental knowledge (in either author or reader) counts for little. A nonfictionalist reading presupposes that the persona’s most distinctive trait is environmental proficiency—not the professional scientist’s

command of data and theory but the working knowledge of someone more knowledgeable than we, who seeks to communicate what he or she knows in a shareable form. It presupposes that the persona’s chief rhetorical resource is exposition, that the metaphorical and tonal and meditative complications enriching exposition cannot be distinguished as the sole or even chief ways in which the text becomes artful, that the text’s outer mimetic function is as important as its intertextual dimension, and that its selectivity is an instrument for promoting knowledge rather than suppressing it. If the spirit of fiction is that a rose by any other name would smell as sweet, the spirit of nonfiction is that “without the name, any flower is more or less a stranger to you.”³⁰ In other words, if environmental nonfiction shows itself ignorant of the known facts of nature, it does so at peril.

“What, a new nominalism? Must we study Roger Torrey Peterson’s bird books in order to read literature?” I am tempted to reply: Yes, that would be a very good thing indeed, and not just for nonfiction but for fictive genres as well. In the case of Whitman’s “Lilacs,” for example, it is well to know why the hermit thrush (suggested by Burroughs) was Whitman’s bird of choice, and to know enough about its habits to appreciate why it makes environmental sense for the thrush to be metaphorically but not metonymically connected with the lilacs. Environmental proficiency being a neglected art among the American bourgeoisie, I am all in favor of turning the resources of literature to its remediation whenever possible. But certainly neither I, nor Burroughs or Ruskin as we have seen, believe that the poet’s or essayist’s highest calling has ever been to teach ornithology. Rather, their view was that the potency of the environmental text consisted not just in the reader’s transaction with it but also in reanimating and redirecting the reader’s transactions with nature. This is a point on which Peterson’s guides enlighten us, teaching us as they do a lesson in outer mimesis: the superiority, *for purposes of reference*, of the artist’s drawing to the photograph and the unassisted eye. Peterson’s schematic bird drawings, with their emphasis on a limited number of field marks, are highly abstract renderings that have proved, in the experience of veteran birders, to enable the student to identify the originals more effectively than would a denser mimetic image, such as a photograph in the Audubon Society field guide. The capacity of the stylized image to put the reader or viewer in touch with the environment is precisely what needs stressing as a counter to the assumptions that

stylization must somehow work against outer mimesis or take precedence over it. We need to recognize stylization's capacity for what the poet-critic Francis Ponge calls *adéquation*: verbalizations that are not replicas but equivalents of the world of objects, such that writing in some measure bridges the abyss that inevitably yawns between language and the object-world.³¹

It should come as no surprise to find the aesthetics of dual accountability applicable beyond the expository, in the realm of fictive poesis as well. Indeed, in poets like Whitman and Gerard Manley Hopkins, inwardness produces outwardness, exuberance produces catalog.

Glory be to God for dappled things,—
 For skies of couple-colour as a brindled cow;
 For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim;
 Fresh-firecoal chestnut-falls; finches' wings;
 Landscape plotted and pieced—fold, fallow, and plough;
 And all trades, their gear, and tackle and trim.³²

What makes Hopkins's exquisite responsiveness to environmental stimuli especially striking is the unlikeliness of it. He views landscape in a mood of prayerful exaltation that could easily have thrust him upward after glancing briefly outward. Indeed, properly speaking this is not a landscape at all. Hopkins creates a collage by darting in all directions at once in search of pied images. His fondness for collecting perceptual bits bespeaks a detachment of the aesthetic specialist from the ordinary landscapes and rhythms of country life. But how delicately responsive the poem is to the stimuli it registers! Who would have thought to see trout's "rose-moles all in stipple"? In this way, aestheticism produces environmental bonding. Literally, the poet sees a painted fish; effectively, the aestheticist distortion animates the trout and makes its body palpable. There can be no question that this is a live trout shimmering for an instant in Hopkins's imaginary pool. With another glance, Hopkins evokes the feel and look of chestnut-falls, with another the mottled look of the agricultural landscape. So the poem is after all not just a "space of accumulation" but a tiny energizer that disperses the reader's attention, in imitation of the poet's own, out to various points of environmental contact. Activating this process is an idiosyncratic blend of old-fashioned natural theology and new-fashioned delight in the materiality of natural *things*.³³

The symbiosis of object-responsiveness and imaginative shaping that we have seen in the series of examples from Lopez to Hopkins, as well as in the theories of Burroughs and Ruskin, calls into question the charges of epistemological naïveté and ideological tyranny that have been leveled against "classic realism" by proponents of the theory of representation. "The strategies of the classic realist text," alleges Catherine Belsey, "divert the reader from what is contradictory within it to the renewed recognition (misrecognition) of what he or she already 'knows,' knows because the myths and signifying systems of the classic realist text re-present experience in the ways in which it is conventionally articulated in our society."³⁴ Clearly this need not be so. Representational projects that aspire to render the object-world need not be monologic, may indeed be founded on self-division about the possibilities of such a project, may even make these self-divisions explicit to the reader, and are as likely to dislocate the reader as to placate her. Indeed it might be quite difficult to find among the realist classics a clear case of classic realism as Belsey defines it.

Environmental representation's power to invent, stylize, and dislocate while at the same time pursuing a decidedly referential project can be further illustrated by a botanical passage from Mary Austin's *Land of Little Rain*, which describes flowers blooming in the Sierras.

They drift under the alternate flicker and gloom of the windy rooms of pines, in gray rock shelters, and by the ooze of blind springs, and their juxtapositions are the best imaginable. Lilies come up out of fern beds, columbine swings over meadowsweet, white rein-orchids quake in the leaning grass. Open swales, where in wet years may be running water, are plantations of false hellebore (*Veratrum californicum*), tall, branched candelabra of greenish bloom above the sessile, sheathing, boat-shaped leaves, semi-translucent in the sun. A stately plant of the lily family, but why "false"? It is frankly offensive in its character, and its young juices deadly as any hellebore that ever grew.

Like most mountain herbs it has an uncanny haste to bloom. One hears by night, when all the wood is still, the crepitatious rustle of the unfolding leaves and the pushing flower-stalk within, that has open blossoms before it has fairly uncramped from the sheath.

(LLR 118)

Notice how quickly the passage comes to rest on the false hellebore plantations, which then blot out the rest of the landscape and become its

sole denizens. Then the plantations become reduced to a single generic plant that dominates the whole foreground, and Austin proceeds to describe what could not possibly be perceived, even with the aid of mechanical gadgets: “the crepitatious rustle of the unfolding leaves and the pushing flower-stalk within.” This language refers to actual processes, which at the visual level can be rendered by time-lapse photography, then in its pioneering stages of development.³⁵ But of course we cannot *hear* all this. Austin’s stylization creates such a hyperfocus on the false hellebore plant as to suggest the effects of regional grotesque, like Wing Biddlebaum’s monstrous-seeming hands in the opening story of Sherwood Anderson’s *Winesburg, Ohio*. The plant, like the hands, expands to fill the universe of the text. This analogy could be pushed further, for the sudden, momentary glimpse of the grisly or the bizarre is an Austin trademark. Yet mimesis is not *forgone*, any more than it is in Anderson’s representation of midwestern culture, or in the expressionist genre paintings of Thomas Hart Benton, who elongates hillocks, implements, and body parts. On the contrary, Austin might even be seen as Peterson’s botanical counterpart: painting in words the equivalent of an illustration of *Vera-trum californicum* for a turn-of-the-century flower book, the field marks impossibly but revealingly magnified. Similarly, Thoreau’s mouse passage, with its combination of clinical documentary opening and personalized anecdote, recalls the interweave of data and autobiographical vignette to be found in his primary sourcebook for American mammalogy, Audubon and Bachman’s *Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America*.³⁶ The difference between these examples of artistry and the two handbooks lies not in the plenitude and fidelity with which objective detail is rendered but in the artist’s desire to establish a counterpoint between the inner and outer landscapes. In these works the artist does much more than derealize the objective landscape through discursive imposition or preemption by intertext.

As the Austin passage partially illustrates, the act of imaging in words the actual but imperceptible demonstrates the importance of outer mimesis in environmental writing.

One has to visualize the life of these insects beneath the rushing-hard cold of Whitetail three: some kind of food was coming down that creek in large amounts, at a very rapid rate, and was being trapped

by these larvae. My mind goes back to the branches beneath Whitetail three. There were not really that many, about one submerged limb every ten yards, but there were many twigs and lesser branches along the banks, dangling and submerged, also covered with caddis flies. The animals had obviously taken up all the available space on those twigs ranging from one the size of a pin to one the size of a railroad tie supporting the bridge. The fact of these flies’ dependence on twigs for homesites was impressive only until one looked at the larvae with a hand lens. Each larva lived in a house, constructed by itself. Each larva’s house was to the untrained eye so similar as to be identical to every other larva’s house, the detailed architecture and accoutrements of each house built according to the same set of blueprints, and each not only fastened to twigs but *made* of twigs. One sensed no colony of caddis flies, as one senses a colony of cliff swallows, but rather sensed a set of instructions within each fly larva that chose twigs to build a house, arranged and glued those twigs in an identifiable pattern, and finished the job by adding exactly two much longer twigs, so that the final house resembled a tube with runners.³⁷

In this passage from *Keith County Journal*, John Janovy, Jr., builds an increasingly dense image of where and how the larvae of caddis flies build their “houses” and what they look like. Janovy disclaims objectivity, reminding us that his image is a constructed thing (“One has to visualize,” “My mind goes back,” “One sensed”), switching perspective back and forth between the lab and the field. The little narrative in the last sentence, so painstakingly detailed, is (he makes no bones about it) a complete fabrication. Janovy could not possibly have seen the gene-driven nest-building occur as he makes us see it—could not have seen it even under a microscope, let alone with the naked eye. Yet the passage comports with the entomological facts: the inner landscape is symbiotic with the outer. His reflexiveness hardly amounts to a forfeiture of objectivity, much less to proof that the passage has lost touch with its outer landscape. “Language need not know the world perfectly in order to communicate perceptions adequately,” as Annie Dillard writes in another connection,³⁸ in the spirit of my epigraph from Hilary Putnam. Indeed, Janovy’s “subjectiveness” itself, far from functioning simply as a compromising or distorting agent, proves to be the means through which the larvae’s

houses are realized as an actuality. Amateur nature lovers walking along the Whitetail in western Nebraska might not notice them; those that did might not recognize them; those that recognized them might not understand their construction. But those that do, like Janovy, in order to communicate what they know, would have to reinvent the scene with imagery they themselves could not possibly have seen, in order to make us see it. They would have to portray the scene, as here, with much more vividness and intensity and magnification than we would see it in the field, even with eyes awakened by this passage. The result is a more complicated version of Austin's magnified false hellebore plant. "Distortion" turns out in this case to thrust us closer than ever before to the object-world. "One has to visualize . . ." That is, one has to imagine. One has to invent, to extrapolate, to fabricate. Not in order to create an alternative reality but to see what without the aid of the imagination isn't likely to be seen at all.

To reverse Emerson's conclusion to the "Idealism" section of *Nature*, perhaps the chief advantage of the dual accountability hypothesis in approaching the environmental nonfiction of Austin and Thoreau is that it is precisely the view least satisfactory to the mind.³⁹ It refuses to allow "mind" or "language" or "history" or "culture" to have its way over discourse unchecked. Whatever the conscious politics of the reader who espouses a philosophical antireferentialism in the domain of literary theory, that stance underrepresents the claims of the environment on humanity by banishing it from the realms of discourse except as something absent. It forbids discourse the project of evoking the natural world through verbal surrogates and thereby attempting to bond the reader to the world as well as to discourse: it forbids enabling the reader to see as a seal might see. From this standpoint, not mimesis but antireferentialism looks like the police. This holds not only for nonfiction but also for fictive genres, including poetry, which of all literary genres one might suppose to be nonreferential. Wendell Berry, for example, objects to defining poetry in terms of its specialization—that is, language; for "the subject of poetry is not words, it is the world, which poets have in common with other people." Berry's either/or rhetoric overstates the case, but the case is not trivial. "If a *culture* goes for too long," Berry writes elsewhere, "without producing poets and others who concern themselves with the problems and proprieties of humanity's practical connection to nature,

then the work of all poets may suffer, and so may nature."⁴⁰ This is a sobering thought, that the attenuation of mimesis might threaten nature itself. Yet, on reflection, we see that it is no less cogent than its opposite, that mimesis itself threatens nature by tempting us to accept cozening copies for the real thing.

Why Care?

It is not, after all, very hard to show that one of the projects of the environmental text is to render the object-world and that this project is sometimes best achieved through what would seem to be outright fiction or distortion. It is harder to give a searching explanation of why someone would want to do this. Berry's ring of self-evident finality warns us off, yet it is precisely here that we need to press him. Why, aside from commercial reasons, should an artist want to make minute extrospection a high priority? Why should writers like Janovy or Austin or Thoreau want to create landscapes in which obscure or overlooked objects become magnified or more densely rendered than they would be in the ordinary experience of them? Lopez's two-landscapes theory becomes mystical at this point. It is a description of a relational structure, not a theory of motive. I immerse myself in a landscape; it imprints itself on my mind; so my texts become a partial register of it. This is all very well; there is probably a lot of truth to it; but in the long run the theory of place osmosis is just as insufficient to explain the choice of a mimetic mode, and for much the same reason, as the theory of intertextuality is to explain the choice of a plot-oriented structure over an associative structure.

Doubtless no single explanation suffices. One is surely the sheer aesthetic and intellectual challenge of being held accountable to faithful rendering of the object-world. "Falsehood is so easy, truth so difficult," as George Eliot writes in the course of likening her painstakingly circumstantial account of rural vernacular culture in *Adam Bede* to Dutch realist painting. More relevant to environmental representation specifically, this sense of accountability may be intensified by a moral or even religious conviction as to the rightness of artistic conception being shaped by what the environment offers it: "no ideas but in things"; "first, there must be observance of the ruling organic law"; "God forbid that we should give

out a dream of our own imagination for a pattern of the world." These three voices are, respectively, William Carlos Williams, John Ruskin, and Francis Bacon—all in their own ways great empiricists though of wildly different doctrinal persuasions.⁴¹ That this ethos of deference to the object all too frequently yields to its opposite is clear enough—that Bacon can sponsor the manipulation of nature and that the Dutch realism he helped inspire can become an armature of the emerging commercial order.⁴² But the more fundamental point is that the ethos—betrayed though it may eventually be—of basing art on disciplined extrospection is in the first instance an affirmation of environment over self, over appropriative homocentric desire. It affirms, as Gerard Manley Hopkins affirms in a burst of proto-Heideggerian exuberance, that

Each mortal thing . . .
Deals out that being indoors each one dwells;
Selves—goes itself; *myself* it speaks and spells,
Crying *What I dó is for me: for that I came.*⁴³

As Norman Bryson has shown in the case of still life painting, the depiction of trivial objects can be a way of asserting art's primacy over matter (in the abstractions of Paul Cézanne or Juan Gris, for instance) or it can be a way of achieving (as in Juan Sánchez Cotán or Francisco de Zurbarán) a "renunciation of normal human priorities" and humbling the self by "forcing the eye to discover in the trivial base of life intensities and subtleties which are normally ascribed to things of great worth." "Opposing the anthropocentrism of the 'higher' genres, it assaults," at least in principle, "the centrality, value and prestige of the human subject."⁴⁴ The same, I think, could be said with even greater force about extrospective depiction of natural objects in the outdoors.

Discussing Austin, I likened her flower to the effect of regional grotesque, thinking at that point of the "hyperreality" that Bryson also notices in still life.⁴⁵ This notion of environmental art as a deliberate dislocation of ordinary perception deserves to be taken quite seriously. For the serious pursuit of natural history, from its premodern origins in the late Renaissance, has often been considered somewhat "grotesque." Field naturalists in the early republic were widely seen as eccentric misfits. William Bartram makes good-humored capital out of the trend, recount-

ing for example the nickname the Indians gave him, "puc-puggy," the flower hunter (while also making it clear that they stood in awe of his botanical knowledge).⁴⁶ Cooper made the myopic pedantry of Obed Bat the butt of his humor in *The Prairie*. Thoreau repeatedly notes that his neighbors thought his preoccupation with nature absurd. Toward the end of the century, which was supposedly the heyday of amateur natural history, his English biographer Henry Salt made the same point about English attitudes in a book on Thoreau's English counterpart, Richard Jefferies: "the naturalist or nature student is everywhere looked upon by the generality of country-folk as a lunatic at large (except, of course, in those lucid intervals when he is engaged in 'killing something.')"⁴⁷ That the prejudice was not confined to the uneducated is clear from the opinion of young Charles Darwin's father that naturalism was a useless profession.

The passages quoted earlier suggest the basis for the prevalent sense of the naturalist as bizarrely out of step. They reveal "abnormal" ways of viewing objective reality. Normal people don't obsess on flowers the way Austin does or on insects the way Janovy does. Normal people don't train themselves to look the way Thoreau trained himself to look. The last entry in his immense *Journal* epitomizes the directional movement of his career in this regard. Thoreau contemplates the gravel of a railroad causeway. The individual pieces loom with a Brobdingnagian hugeness, the gravel "stratified like some slate rocks, on their edges, so that I can tell within a small fraction of a degree from what quarter the rain came . . . Behind each little pebble, as a protecting boulder . . . extends northwest a ridge of sand an inch or more, which it has protected from being washed away" (*J* 14: 346).

Thoreau and other literary naturalists are well aware they see things differently from the average person ("all this," Thoreau continues, "is perfectly distinct to an observant eye, and yet could pass unnoticed by most"); and at times this causes them to accentuate the whimsical and the grotesque. Thoreau does this with particular delicacy in his late essay "Wild Apples," a key naturalist work in the Thoreau canon because the subject is so clearly also a self-image: a cherished Puritan legacy gone crabbed, cranky, and feral. In one sequence, the author describes his late fall foraging practices. "You would not suppose that there was any fruit left there," he chuckles, "but you must look according to system." "With

experienced eyes," he draws forth the fruit from its secret "lurking-places," "perhaps with a leaf or two cemented to it (as Curzon an old manuscript from a monastery's mouldy cellar)," fills his pockets and ambles home, eating "one first from this side, and then from that, to keep my balance."⁴⁸ The essay is a display of field-naturalist apple lore and expertise wrapped in a charming portrait of a slightly dotty wild apple enthusiast that doubles as mock-confession and gentle mockery of the ignorant and perhaps uninterested reader's ability to read landscape.

The notion that intensely focused realistic mimesis of the natural world might be considered a form of grotesque has been pursued by Victorianists with respect to Pre-Raphaelite painting and the poetry of Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Hopkins. In the imagery used to depict the moated grange of Tennyson's "Mariana," Carol T. Christ notes that the very sharpness "conveys a sensitivity morbid in its emotional intensity": "The rusted nails fell from the knots / That held the pear to the gable-wall" and "Unlifted was the clinking latch." The precision, argues Christ, expresses the title figure's derangement. "Mariana's obsession with her desertion keeps her fixated in a static emotional attitude that makes the slightest movement or sound strike her with extreme sharpness . . . Objects appear to her with an acuteness that mesmerizes her"; "the slightness of these impressions conveys a blankness of a mind that under prolonged emotional strain seizes upon any object to find some release." This typifies Christ's analysis: the Victorians, as she says of the Pre-Raphaelites, "created a realism so exaggerated it became expressionistic."⁴⁹ Of Thoreau's apple manuscript somewhat the same could be said. But the magnification of the minute in Thoreauvian nonfiction is not the same as the hypersensitivity to objects in "Mariana." The situation can be clarified by John Everett Millais's notorious mid-Victorian painting, *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1850), where a vernacular boy-Jesus who has hurt his hand is being comforted by working-class parents while standing in a carpenter's shop littered with shavings on the floor, tools and lumber cluttering up the background. The obvious agenda is to counteract religious sentimentalism by aggressively humanizing Christ. It is the visual equivalent of Whitman's "snag-toothed hostler with red hair redeeming sins past and to come."⁵⁰ But the painting, and the poem as well, must be read as revisionist allegories that deconstruct the allegorical mode by setting against it the world of vernacular fact where Jesus

belongs. Otherwise, the hostler is gratuitous and the painting leaves the viewer unsatisfied by a "literalness that is . . . bothersome because it serves no expressive end."⁵¹ Realistic mimesis is not the stalking horse for a revised theology; it is that theology.

What is true of Millais's carpenter shop is even truer of the natural environment of the environmental text. It requires us to remake our image of the world in terms of a criterion of value intentionally dislocating in its focus on the intractably and minutely factual. Janovy's passage on the caddis fly calls out as Whitman does elsewhere in the 1855 edition, insisting, "I swear I think now that every thing without exception has an eternal soul! / The trees have, rooted in the ground! the weeds of the sea have! the animals!"⁵² Both affirm that the caddis fly is just as real as we are, has just as much right as you and I do to be taken as the center of the universe around which everything else shall revolve.

If this proposition seems hard to accept, consider another analogy. Think of environmental representation as akin to the novel of manners, where tea ceremonies, tiny conversational nuances, and minute gestures and variances of dress matter intensely.⁵³ The process of conforming to the codes begins when one accepts that the type of accent or dress one puts on really matters. At first we are not aware of the codes; then we perceive them as artifice; eventually we accept them as reality. So too with environmental literacy. We can think of it as a kind of culture, with local and historical variations, requiring efforts of study and adaptation.⁵⁴ What makes the analogy especially pertinent is that the niceties of manners fiction and environmental representation will probably seem to most readers of this book almost equally quaint. To require late twentieth-century urbanites to discriminate between edible and inedible plants in the forest or identify by feel different types of apples in a barrel (as John Burroughs claimed every New York farmboy could) seems about as finicky as to require them to be as conscious as Jane Austen and Henry James were of modes of proper chaperonage, polite replies to engraved invitations, and rituals for making social calls. Yet both are forms of competence in external affairs on which prestige and sometimes even survival have depended. People who continue to exhibit them after they no longer seem important we consider eccentric, with perhaps an admixture of respect for their knowledge of a lost art. The importance Lopez attaches to the reality of what's "out there" as a test of one's Arctic fictions

reflects his awareness that in the cultures of the Arctic, both of aborigines and of scientific expeditioners, failures of accuracy may be life threatening.

In the late twentieth century, most westerners stand in much the same relation to the natural environment as a new immigrant to America without much prior knowledge of national custom. Regional terrain organizes itself for us in the guise of maps and highways; rarely do we bring its topography, system of watercourses, vegetation zones, and atmospheric patterns into focus as organizing forces when we drive rapidly through them on our daily commute. Insulated to such a degree from their direct influence, we do not feel them constituting us. Even if we have studied regional ecology, our daily routines may keep it from percolating through to the level of ordinary perception. The challenge, for those interested in assuming it, thus becomes to a considerable extent “reinhabitation”: refamiliarizing ourselves with the physical environment that our preindustrial forebears perforce had to know better experientially, that their aboriginal forebears perforce knew better than they.⁵⁵ One way to answer this challenge is to sink one’s roots more deeply in place. “It is only in the place that one belongs to, intimate and familiar, long watched over,” affirms Wendell Berry for example, “that the hawk stoops into the clearing before one’s eyes; the wood drake, aloof and serene in his glorious plumage, swims out of his hiding place.”⁵⁶ This is the “bioregionalist” approach to self-education in environmental literacy.⁵⁷ Alternatively, Barry Lopez provides a complementary approach in his major books, *Wolves and Men* and *Arctic Dreams*, which draw heavily on sojourns among northern aboriginal peoples but are not localized anywhere and are inspired as much by intelligent eclectic reading in science, anthropology, and myth as by direct conversations with nature.

Nonfiction writers such as Thoreau, Austin, Berry, Dillard, and Janovy—and poets like Wordsworth, Frost, and Snyder—seem to have begun adulthood as youths with relatively modest degrees of eco-precociousness who became caught up in the quest for environmental literacy. In each case, one could deconstruct this interest, and the works that express it, by questioning whether environmental literacy was unequivocally of the first importance to them. For Janovy, it subserved his professorial ambitions as a parasitologist; for Dillard, it was artistic pigment, on much the same level as other forms of imagery; for Austin, it meant a one-way ticket out of a bad marriage and a dead town. By the same token, one

could deconstruct our hypothetical immigrant’s motives: very likely he or she was less interested in learning American manners per se than in using them as a means to another end. But certainly the pursuit of environmental or cultural literacy has been more valuable in the estimation of the people involved than to their debunkers.

The question then shifts from whether environmental facticity or environmental codes of manners matter in the formation of environmental writers’ attitudes and works to whether today’s readers should consider such matters important. The most obvious answer, although not the ultimate one, is that they make a difference in the way one reads. Even what seems a quite allegorical representation of nature may look quite different as one becomes more environmentally literate. As an example, take one of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s few still-anthologized lyrics: his late poem “Aftermath.”

When the summer fields are mown,
When the birds are fledged and flown,
 And the dry leaves strew the path;
With the falling of the snow,
With the cawing of the crow,
Once again the fields we mow
 And gather in the aftermath.

Not the sweet, new grass with flowers
Is this harvesting of ours;
 Not the upland clover bloom;
But the rowen mixed with weeds,
Tangled tufts from marsh and meads
Where the poppy drops its seeds
 In the silence and the gloom.⁵⁸

These lines positively cry out to be read as an allegory of the scanty harvest of old age, as of course they are. In my teaching experience, few readers think of giving the poem anything but a symbolic reading. Few know that “aftermath” is an agricultural term for the second and inferior hay crop mown late in the season. That discovery changes one’s reading of the poem: “we” can now mean working people as well as poets and

other armchair harvesters; the poem's landscape now looks as much like the abstract of a literal farm as the concretization of a gestalt. We begin to credit Longfellow with having a certain taste for the poetry of earth as well as the poetry of moral abstraction. Perhaps he admired Keats for more reasons than one.

The initial failure of readerly vision doubtless reflects the attenuation of environmental knowledge ensuing from modern urbanization: the decline of poetry readers conversant enough with agricultural life to grasp the full meaning of "aftermath." Relative even to gentry-class premodernists like Longfellow, contemporary readers lead urbanized lives, whether in point of fact they reside as he did in Cambridge, Massachusetts, or in some leafy exurb. *This* concrete dissociation of sensibility, the loss of a culture of reciprocity with the natural environment, is more profound than the comparatively rarefied late Renaissance schism so termed by T. S. Eliot.⁵⁹ It conduces to the marginalization of the "descriptive" aspect of premodern poetry, to a preferred reading of images as a part of a symbolic construct or psychological landscape. Therefore, although the reader who does not know what "aftermath" literally means probably does not know what "rowen" looks like either, that ignorance is unlikely to cause anxiety (no student has ever asked me to explain); our reading priorities make inability to identify a particular kind of grass a unimportant. Yet "rowen" is the ancillary clue that will help remediate one's ignorance, for it is a synonym for the telltale aftermath—the second growth of grass.⁶⁰

But a more cogent argument for environmental literacy than the historical one (based on its value in helping to decode writings of a bygone era) is simply that it is, if anything, getting more important as it seems to grow less. The impression that human affairs are not in fundamental ways subject to regulation by the environment is created by our ostensible success at regulating it. This blindness to the environment produces unintended destabilizing consequences like skin lesions from the ozone hole, owing partly to the products of cooling technologies that have insulated us from confronting the scandal of our environmental dependence. The situation is the obverse of Marxist reification theory. According to that theory, the bourgeoisie succumbs to a false impression of the givenness of the environment that has actually been created by the efforts of humankind. We have seen similar illusions at work in environ-

mental aesthetics. What I have called the America-as-nature reduction in American literary studies disguises the roles of history and homocentrism in shaping what we fancy as the givenness of nature. But there is also a fallacy of derealization: the bourgeoisie's false assumption that environmental interventions in its planned existence are nothing more than fortuitous occasional events.⁶¹ The notion of art (and other cultural practices) as discursive functions carried on within social "spaces" reinforces this mentality no less efficiently than air-conditioning. The facticity of the environmental other that faces the human practitioner collapses into the vision of a "dialectical relationship between the body and a space structured according to . . . mythico-ritual oppositions."⁶² The contrary evidence is as simple as breathing subzero air, but in the discursive world such evidence can be repressed.

The desire to suppress the intimation of facticity surely runs deeper than mesmerization by literary theory, or even by the buffering accoutrements of commodity culture. Certainly a farming family living in a remote area before the dawn of modern medicine, transportation, and electricity would have been forced to conduct life with a much greater sense of environmental dependence than we have. But beneath this sociohistorical difference, respect for environmental facticity in any era might be felt to smack of acquiescence, fatalism, even death. Sooner or later, the implacable *thereness* of the external world is found to represent the adversary. No matter how resolutely cheerful or stoic one's temperament, in some moods or phases nature will metamorphose from possibility into fate, as for the aging Emerson.

It is striking in this regard that nowhere in modern aesthetic reflection has the animus against nature's givenness burst forth more spectacularly than in celebrations of the wonders of the most realistic of all media, cybernetically produced virtual reality (VR). Already it lies within technology's power to simulate an orchestra, a landscape, and any action or sensation in space with a finer and intenser degree of realization than the experience itself would bring. What thoughts does this prospect of hyperreality inspire? Not, of course, delight at having realized the world, but delight at mastery over it; for "In cyberspace, there is no need to move about in a body like the one you possess in physical reality. You may feel more comfortable, at first, with a body like your 'own' but as you conduct more of your life and affairs in cyberspace your conditioned notion of a

unique and immutable body will give way to a far more liberated notion of 'body' as something quite disposable and, generally, limiting."⁶³ Undoubtedly one reason realist aesthetics has been criticized as an ideological apparatus is that in the much hotter medium of contemporary VR realistic mimesis does seem to have become a godlike instrument of totalitarian power. At last it seems almost in our power not only to image reality perfectly but to "participate" in that perfectly evoked reality without consequences, in experiences over which "we" if not the individual "I" maintain infallible control. Jean Baudrillard makes this linkage explicit in his dystopian account of what he takes to be the three "orders of simulacra": the realism of the classical era (which Baudrillard absurdly claims to have a "strict correlation" with the ascetic imperialism of the Jesuits), the epoch of mass production of the premodern industrial revolution, and the epoch of "digitality," of which the quintessential symbols are the computer and the genetic code. This succession, as Baudrillard defines it, is an arrogant displacement of reality ("the demi-urgic ambition to exorcize the natural substance of a thing in order to substitute a synthetic one") that paradoxically has brought us, in the age of VR, "to the collapse of reality into hyperrealism, in the minute duplication of the real," since machines can now generate "a completely imaginary contact-world of sensorial mimetics and tactile mysticism"—"an entire ecology," he tellingly adds.⁶⁴

As history, Baudrillard's essay is wildly sensationalized but thereby all the more revealing as myth: it lays bare the fear that underlies much 1980s historicist theory of representation as a part of the apparatus of modern capitalism, whose effective origins lie in Renaissance era imperialism and whose latter-day result is "the impossible totality of the contemporary world system," as Fredric Jameson writes in the course of a far more painstaking and nuanced analysis than Baudrillard's. Jameson's preferred symbol is not VR but the "hyperspace" of postmodern architecture like the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles, which unlike the products of Baudrillard's simulation machines is a massive eclectic assemblage that bears little relation to mimetic realism. But Jameson, too, diagnoses the postmodern dispensation in architecture as marking an intensified state of social control via environmental recreation to which the age of representational realism was the paleotechnic prelude. Jameson's architecture, like Baudrillard's computers, stands "as something like an imperative to

grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new . . . perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions."⁶⁵ And both are acutely aware that this "imperative" does not begin with the individual consumer's desire (as the previous quotation from a VR entrepreneur disingenuously suggests), although it activates that desire. On the contrary, as a *Business Week* feature on VR states with unintended grimness, "Cyber-space worlds that exist only in the electronic ether can be a powerful tool in the hands of architects, engineers, and scientists" to "boost productivity, improve design, and provide more cost-effective training."⁶⁶

Yet as one contemplates the resources of technologically assisted representation in the era of postmodernity as Baudrillard and Jameson describe it, one begins, on the contrary, to sense that one of literary realism's advantages, which standard accounts of its ideological agenda occlude, is precisely its comparative impotence: its inability to dominate the physical world that its texts register, and with this an underlying awareness of its own project as the inexhaustible challenge not of mastering reality so much as trying quixotically to get nearer to it than the conventions of classical and romantic representation had permitted. Without denying that aesthetic realism can validly be characterized from one perspective as a waystation on the path toward total technological control over reality, from another vantage point it signifies precisely the opposite: a resistance to any such manipulation, "the nostalgia for a natural referent of the sign," as Baudrillard slightly calls what he takes to be western culture's ineffective resistance to the succession of increasingly technologically sophisticated orders of simulacra.⁶⁷

In short, paradoxical as it might seem, pondering the issue from an ecocentric standpoint, one of the greatest advantages that linguistic attempts to represent reality, even those that are machine-generated, enjoy over the simulacra of VR is precisely the comparative impotence that requires writers to defer, as we have seen Ruskin and Burroughs defer, to the authority of external nonhuman reality as a criterion of accuracy and value.⁶⁸ Granted that this criterion can never be employed with the objectivity writers claim; granted that their invocation of it presumes that arbitration of what counts as adequate representation will be left to the likes of them. From an ecocentric standpoint a criterion built on a theoretical distinction between human constructedness and nonhuman reality (Lopez's theory of the two landscapes) is far more productive than

a criterion based on the presupposition of the inevitable dominance of constructedness alone (Foucault's theory of discursive formations). This advantage the analogies of minute realism as grotesque and of ecocentrism as a code of manners underscore in different ways by calling attention to the status of nature-responsiveness as a kind of culture, or rather counterculture, that one must pursue in resistance to the intractable homocentrism in terms of which one's psychological and social worlds are always to some degree mapped. Lopez would doubtless want to argue that the humble aspiration of environmental mimesis, under these conditions, is far healthier for an individual, and for a society, than the arrogance of cyberspace.

 CHAPTER FOUR

Walden's *Environmental Projects*



The question is not what you look at—but how you look & whether you see.

—Henry David Thoreau, *Journal*

Man is altogether too much insisted on. The poet says the proper study of mankind is man—I say study to forget all that—take wider views of the universe.

—Thoreau, *Journal*

THOREAU IS THE PATRON SAINT of American environmental writing. This eminence did not come easily to him. For more than a generation after his death, he remained obscure; and in his relatively short life he had to struggle to arrive at the deep understanding of nature for which he is now remembered. Indeed, Thoreau spent his entire career laboriously trying to sort out the competing claims of nature and culture. It is especially in his partial odyssey from environmental naïveté to comparative enlightenment that he looks most representative of his culture and mirrors most closely today's environmentalist ferment. Thoreau started adult life from a less advantageous position than we sometimes realize, as a village businessman's son of classical education rather than having been versed in nature through intensive botanical study, agriculture, or more than a very ordinary sort of experiential contact with it. Unlike William Bartram, he had no man of science for a father; unlike Thomas Jefferson, he had no agrarian roots.¹ From early youth, he enjoyed country rambles, but so did many of his contemporaries. His first intellectual promptings to study and write about nature came from

48. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), p. 83.

49. Annie Dillard, "Walden Pond and Thoreau" (master's thesis, Hollins College, 1968).

50. Paul Carter, *The Road to Botany Bay: An Exploration of Landscape and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 83.

51. Peter Fritzell, *Nature Writing and America: Essays upon a Cultural Type* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1990), pp. 16–35 and passim. Fritzell indicts the ruck of nature writers for turning "away from the potentially exhausting effects of self-consciousness" (p. 17) and opting for what he takes to be a naively "positivistic and representational" stance (p. 16), which he sees as a colonizer's stance: "The vast majority of American nature writing has functioned almost solely to settle the country—to compose it and delineate it . . . to establish . . . names and classifications, to fix (or attempt to fix) the terms of the nonhuman environment." (p. 19). My reservations about Fritzell's argument are chiefly that he sorts the washed from the unwashed too hastily (he has to admit that the differences are less of kind than of degree: p. 34) and that his antirepresentation-ism is too eager an attempt to jump on the postmodern bandwagon. But *Nature Writing and America* is, withal, an important albeit often redundant book. For a roughly parallel discussion of the self-reflexive turn in contemporary American environmental fiction, see Linda Anne Falkenstein, "The Simulated Wilderness in the Contemporary American Novel" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1991); and (with emphasis on feminist deconstructions of wilderness fiction like Jean Stafford's *Mountain Lion* [1947]) Melody Graulich, "'O Beautiful for Spacious Guys': An Essay on the 'Legitimate Inclinations of the Sexes,'" in *The Frontier Experience and the American Dream: Essays on American Literature*, ed. David Mogen, Mark Busby, and Paul Bryant (College Station: Texas A & M University Press, 1989), pp. 186–201.

52. *Audubon*, 93, no. 6 (November–December 1991): "Preserving Paradise," pp. 41, 50. For a critical analysis of this sort of rhetoric, see Lisa Lebduska, "How Green Was My Advertising: American Ecoconsumerism," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*, 1 (1993): 5–17.

53. Harry Thurston, "Power in a Land of Remembrance," *Audubon*, 93, no. 6 (November–December 1991): 59.

54. On this point, a helpful discussion is Edward W. Soja's chapter on "spatialized ontology" in *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1990), pp. 118–137.

55. Packer, "American Romantic Landscapes," pp. 263–264; and Wilson, *American Sublime*, p. 128. For the text of "The Prairies," see *Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 3d ed., ed. Nina Baym et al. (New York: Norton, 1989), 1: 894n and 896. The editors point out that the literary nationalist note was a

belated (and therefore more than ordinarily self-conscious?) substitution. The original line replaced by "For which the speech of England has no name" was "And fresh as the young earth, ere man had sinned"—a similitude that discloses the Eurocentric root of the pastoral impetus to which Bryant later gives a more specifically postcolonial expression.

56. See especially Leah Dilworth, "Rhythm Nation: Modernism, Primitivism, and *The American Rhythm*," pp. 242–301 of Dilworth's Ph.D. dissertation, "Imagining the Primitive: Representations of Native Americans in the Southwest, 1880–1930" (Yale University, 1992). For a more sympathetic perspective, see Lois Rudnick, "Re-Naming the Land: Anglo Expatriate Women in the Southwest," in *The Desert Is No Lady: Southwestern Landscapes in Women's Writing and Art*, ed. Vera Norwood and Janice Monk (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), pp. 12–26. Austin's expertise, such as it was, was recognized; she authored the chapter on Native American aesthetics for the *Cambridge History of American Literature* (1917–1921).

57. On Austin's life, the most illuminating sources are Esther Lanigan Stineman, *Mary Austin: Song of a Maverick* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), and Austin's own *Earth Horizon: Autobiography* (New York: Literary Guild, 1932). For Austin's early trials in California, despite her enthusiasm for the country itself, see Stineman, pp. 31–43, and Austin, pp. 192–194.

58. Guy Rotella, in *Reading and Writing Nature* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1991), writes sensitively about this poem's (admittedly limited) capacity to open itself up to recording nature's motions (pp. 9–10) and, throughout his study, of the tendency of the Puritan epistemology to encourage observation of nature even while circumscribing it within a providentialist paradigm. Although Puritanism could produce a rationale of land appropriation and transformation (cf. Cecelia Tichi, *New World, New Earth: Environmental Reform in American Literature from the Puritans through Whitman* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979]), it could equally, indeed much more self-consistently, justify the stance of suspending all human desire for the sake of devoted contemplation of the structure of God's handiwork. See also in this connection Elisa New, *The Regenerate Lyric: Theory and Innovation in American Poetry* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

59. Bradstreet, "Contemplations," line 7, in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, 1: 97; Bartram, *Travels*, p. 126.

60. Austin, *Earth Horizon*, p. 195.

3. Representing the Environment

1. See for example Yi-fu Tuan, "Common Traits in Perception: The Senses," in *Topophilia: A Study of Environmental Perception, Attitudes, and Values* (1974;

rpt., with new preface, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), pp. 5–12; E. V. Walter, *Placeways: A Theory of the Human Environment* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 132–145 and passim; and Hans Jonas's classic essay "The Nobility of Sight" (1953), in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (1966; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), which points out that "since the days of Greek philosophy sight has been hailed as the most excellent of the senses" (p. 135).

2. Samuel A. Jones to A. W. Hosmer, 16 April 1903, in *Toward the Making of Thoreau's Modern Reputation*, ed. Fritz Oehlschlaeger and George Hendrick (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979), p. 387.

3. Sharon Cameron, *Writing Nature: Henry Thoreau's Journal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 44. In "A Crisis in My Mental History," Mill explains why reading Wordsworth helped him get through his breakdown: "In the first place, these poems addressed themselves powerfully to one of the strongest of my pleasurable susceptibilities, the love of rural objects and natural scenery" (John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1924], p. 103). See also Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Romantic Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 14ff., for thoughtful reflections on the current unfashionableness of Mill's response and the need to take it more seriously.

4. For a sophisticated anatomy of contemporary debates about the viability and politics of representation from a perspective professedly neither for nor against mimesis, see Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1986), a study deeply informed by poststructuralist and antecedent literary and philosophical theory. To make an elegant story extremely short, Prendergast finds more problems with "a wholesale rejection of the idea of mimesis" than with retention of some version of mimesis, although all versions seem problematic (pp. 252–253). For my purposes, the utility of his discussion is limited by his concentration on fiction and his understanding of mimesis as a textualized internalization of social norms; but I have found his intricately lucid presentation most enlightening.

5. Leonard Lutwack, *The Role of Place in Literature* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), p. 24. At the outset, Lutwack declares that "a concern for time rather than place is the mark of civilization . . . the maturation of an individual is a process of growing away from nature" (p. 4).

6. Carolyn Porter, "History and Literature: 'After the New Historicism,'" *New Literary History*, 21 (1990): 257.

7. This deconstructive process effectively began with *American Realism: New Essays*, ed. Eric Sundquist (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982). Among subsequent books, perhaps the most pertinent here are two by contribu-

tors to that collection: Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), and Michael Davitt Bell, *The Problem of American Realism: Studies in the Cultural History of a Literary Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993). The confident tone of Kaplan's opening statement indicates how quickly the revisionary reading has taken hold: "from an objective reflection of contemporary social life, realism has become a fictional conceit, or deceit, packaging and naturalizing an official version of the ordinary" (p. 1). A third contributor's study, Philip Fisher's *Hard Facts: Setting and Form in the American Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), gives much more attention to the quality of thingness as such in realist representation (see "The Life History of Objects: The Naturalist Novel and the City," pp. 128–178), though his major concern is the symbolic properties of things as psychograms, sociological gestalts, commodity forms, etc. At least as influential as any Americanist work in the reinterpretation of realism, however, have been more general Marxist and Marxoid treatises like Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981).

8. Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Fried finds realism a "blandly normalizing bias" that confuses cause with effect and by limiting intention "to an initial choice of subject and point of view plus a general will to realism . . . implies a prejudicial conception of the realistic project as merely photographic" (pp. 64, 10–11). If this "exact transcription" model of realism were the best that a theory of realism's realism could manage, then one could understand Fried's displeasure.

9. Christopher Salter, "John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* as a Primer for Cultural Geography," in *Humanistic Geography and Literature: Essays on Experience of Place*, ed. Douglas C. D. Pocock (London: Croom Helm, 1981), pp. 156–157. Salter and William J. Lloyd's coauthored *Landscape in Literature* (Washington: Association of American Geographers, 1977) reflects on the limits of realist assumptions while defending their viability within limits. I by no means wish to suggest that all cultural geographers are empirical mimeticists. The contemporary interest in "reading" place as text has also drawn geographers to poststructuralist and Marxist theory; see, for example, J. Duncan and N. Duncan, "(Re)reading the Landscape," *Society and Space*, 6 (1988): 117–126; and especially Edward W. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies: The Reassertion of Space in Critical Social Theory* (London: Verso, 1989). The broader point is that a number of contemporary humanistic geographers have turned to literary sources to tell them things about landscape that "scientific" geography seems not to register. In approaching literature as a supplementary resource, geographers are never so naive as to take it to be a distortion-free mirror of the object-world, nor are they unanimous in their methodologies of reading. As a group, however, their work emphasizes the ways in which literature seeks to engage and reveal actual landscapes. For further

illustration of the range of perspectives brought to bear in this body of scholarship, see “Focus: Literary Landscapes—Geography and Literature,” ed. L. Anders Sandberg and John S. Marsh, *The Canadian Geographer*, 32 (1988): 266–276.

10. George Levine, “Scientific Realism and Literary Representation,” *Raritan*, 10, no. 4 (Spring 1991): 23, 21. See also Levine’s editorial introduction to the symposium *Realism and Representation: Essays on the Problem of Realism in Relation to Science, Literature, and Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), which is helpful for bibliography as well as commentary. (As Levine notes, however, “strong” realism is scantily represented in the collection.) In humanistic fields outside literature, some of the recent work of Hilary Putnam is pertinent, especially *The Many Faces of Realism* (LaSalle, Ill.: Open Court Press, 1987) and the papers collected as *Realism with a Human Face*, ed. James Conant (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). What to me is most interesting about Putnam’s project is his attempt to establish a ground for realism that frees it from having to meet standards of “scientific” objectivity.

11. O’Sullivan’s photographs, remarks Barbara Novak, “seem to arise without the intervention of ideas about ‘art,’ from a one-to-one encounter of camera and nature. The artist’s control, though convention-free, is of course present, but often in the most informal way, as if the photographs were taking themselves” (“Landscape Permuted: From Painting to Photography,” in *Photography in Print: Writings from 1816 to the Present*, ed. Vicki Goldberg [New York: Simon and Schuster, 1981], p. 176).

12. I wish to dodge the vexed question of whether surrealism and avant-gardism generally are hegemonic or insurgent. My inclination, as on the subject of pastoral’s ideological valence, is to say: either or both.

13. John Burroughs, “Nature and the Poets,” in *Pepacton* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1881), pp. 93, 104, 94–95, 106.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

15. John Burroughs, *Ways of Nature* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1905), p. 208, quoted by Lynn L. Merrill, *The Romance of Victorian Natural History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 139, in the course of a chapter on Burroughs that clarifies the point helpfully.

16. Ralph Lutts’s *The Nature Fakers: Wildlife, Science, and Sentiment* (Golden, Colo.: Fulcrum, 1990) gives a detailed historical account and analysis of this controversy.

17. Burroughs, *Pepacton*, p. 155.

18. See Lutts, *The Nature Fakers*, p. 44.

19. Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 53–90.

20. An obverse but also, I think, very fruitful approach is taken by James

Krasner, in *The Entangled Eye: Visual Perception and the Representation of Nature in Post-Darwinian Narrative* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), which examines as its subtitle indicates visual perception and representation of nature in British fiction and nonfiction from Richard Jefferies and Hardy through D. H. Lawrence. Krasner shows by recourse to the history of perception theory during this period that there is a link between the sense conveyed by Darwin’s writing of the perceiver’s inability to grasp and formulate landscape and the inward turn of modern narrative. Although Krasner’s account of the literature of this period as science-responsive is subtle and persuasive, it seems to me more urgent, being more scandalous to current critical orthodoxy, to stress writerly interest in fidelity to the world of objects as against fidelity to perception theory.

21. Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903–1912), 3: 137, 616.

22. *Ibid.*, 3: 584. Ruskin affirmed, “I have never known one whose thirst for visible fact was at once so eager and so methodic” (*Praeterita*, in *Works*, 35: 51.)

23. George Eliot, review of Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. 3, in *Westminster Review*, 9, n.s. (1856), reprinted in *Ruskin: The Critical Heritage*, ed. J. L. Bradley (London: Routledge, 1984), pp. 180–181. For Ruskin’s influence on American art and art criticism, see Linda S. Ferber and William H. Gerds, *The New Path: Ruskin and the American Pre-Raphaelites* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Brooklyn Museum and Schocken Books, 1985); and Roger B. Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America, 1840–1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). A concise study of the rise of literalism in nineteenth-century British aesthetics is Patricia M. Ball, *The Science of Aspects: The Changing Role of Fact in the Work of Coleridge, Ruskin, and Hopkins* (London: Athlone Press, 1971).

24. Leslie Marmon Silko, “Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination,” *Antaeus*, no. 57 (1986): 85.

25. Barry Lopez, *Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape* (1986; rpt. New York: Bantam, 1987), p. 84. For critical discussion of *Arctic Dreams* and other Lopez works, see particularly Sherman Paul, “Rereading Barry Lopez,” in *For Love of the World: Essays on Nature Writers* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), pp. 67–107, and Scott Slovic, “‘A More Particularized Understanding’: Seeking Qualitative Awareness in Barry Lopez’s *Arctic Dreams*,” in *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1992), pp. 137–166.

26. Linda Hutcheon, “Metafictional Implications for Novelistic Reference,” in *On Referring in Literature*, ed. Anna Whiteside and Michael Issacharoff (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 9. In a revised version of this discussion in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (London: Routledge, 1988), pp. 155–157, Hutcheon adds a fifth dimension of reference to

allow for reader response and, somewhat ominously from my point of view, attenuates the notion of outer mimesis by rebaptizing it as “the textualized extratextual kind of reference,” thus according primacy to textualization.

27. For the first draft, see J. Lyndon Shanley, *The Making of Walden* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), pp. 192–193.

28. Ronald Earl Clapper, “The Development of *Walden*: A Genetic Text,” (Ph.D. diss., UCLA, 1967), p. 605.

29. For the reference to Thoreau’s marginalia and the identification of the “distinguished naturalist” as Louis Agassiz, see Philip Van Doren Stern, *The Annotated Walden* (New York: Clarkson Potter, 1970), p. 353.

30. John Burroughs, *Riverby* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1894), p. 35.

31. For exemplification, see Francis Ponge’s collection of prose-poems, *The Voice of Things*, ed. and trans. Beth Archer (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974); for analysis of Ponge’s critical position (which is finally somewhat more idealist than I myself am comfortable with), see Ian Higgins, *Francis Ponge* (London: Athlone Press, 1979), pp. 51–66; and Paul, *For Love of the World*, p. 19 and passim, to which I am indebted for first calling Ponge’s work to my attention.

32. *Gerard Manley Hopkins: A Selection of His Poems and Prose*, ed. Helen Gardner (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1953), “Pied Beauty,” p. 30.

33. For the association between modernism and spaces of accumulation, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 48–49 and passim. On Hopkins’s aesthetics, see for example Ball, *Science of Aspects*, and Carol T. Christ, *The Finer Optic: The Aesthetics of Particularity in Victorian Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975). “Insensitivity to particularity,” Christ states, “becomes [for Hopkins] the measure of man’s corruption . . . Renewed sensitivity to particularity heals this corruption” (pp. 98–99). See Tom Zaniello, *Hopkins in the Age of Darwin* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988), for discussion of Hopkins’s scientific interests.

34. Catherine Belsey, *Critical Practice* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 128. Belsey’s succinct, straightforward presentation of her version of Althusserian poststructuralism contains a helpful panoramic survey of resistance to realism as developed in various recent schools of literary theory from new critical formalism on.

35. Josef Maria Eder, *History of Photography*, trans. Edward Epstein (New York: Columbia University Press, 1945), pp. 523–524; Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880–1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), pp. 100–101. For comparisons of Austin’s art to photography, see Esther Lanigan Stineman, *Mary Austin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 183–187; and Vera Norwood, “The Photographer and the Naturalist: Laura Gilpin and Mary Austin in the Southwest,” *Journal of American Culture*, 5 (1982): 1–28.

36. John James Audubon and John Bachman, *The Viviparous Quadrupeds of North America* (New York: Audubon, 1846), pp. 302–305.

37. John Janovy, Jr., *Keith County Journal* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1978), p. 105.

38. Annie Dillard, *Living by Fiction* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), p. 71.

39. Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature, Address, and Lectures*, ed. Robert E. Spiller and Alfred R. Ferguson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 36.

40. Wendell Berry, “The Specialization of Poetry,” in *Standing by Words* (San Francisco: North Point, 1983), p. 8; Berry, “Poetry and Place,” in *ibid.*, p. 140.

41. George Eliot, *Adam Bede*, Book 2, Chapter 17, par. 5; William Carlos Williams, *Paterson* (New York: New Directions, 1963), p. 14; John Ruskin, *The Elements of Drawing*, in *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903–1912), 15:116; Francis Bacon, *The Great Instauration*, in *Works*, ed. James Spedding, Robert Leslie Ellis, and Douglas Denon Heath, 14 vols. (London, 1857–1874), 4: 32–33.

42. For Bacon’s influence on Dutch painting, see Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983). For an environmentalist critique of the way Baconian empiricism entraps realist painters into a reduction of nature to surface, see Neil Evernden, *The Social Creation of Nature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), pp. 78–80. In Evernden’s widely shared view, the Renaissance introduced a technology of surface realist aesthetics (cf. Samuel Y. Edgerton, Jr., *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* [New York: Basic, 1975]) that created a “purified alternative to the external world, a new ‘Nature’ whose genesis is within the individual” (e.g., the dominance, in painting, of a particular point of perspective) “and which is subsequently used to make sense of external objects” (p. 67). Prior to the Renaissance, as Evernden puts it in a previous work, “the painter represented the world as he experienced it, not just as he saw it”; but “with his mastery of perspective” he was “forced into a placeless world by virtue of the technique he has embraced” (*The Natural Alien* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985], pp. 49, 50). Both of Evernden’s books are brilliantly suggestive throughout, first-rate pieces of environmental reflection; but I think his justifiable criticism of the hazards of realist procedures when crystallized into a system causes him to overstate realism’s capacity to become a technology for displacing the world and to underestimate its capacity for expressing and inducing the kind of awe and wonder at the sense of objects realized in their “isness.”

43. Hopkins, “As Kingfishers Catch Fire,” in *Gerard Manley Hopkins*, p. 51.

44. Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp. 63, 64, 60.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 64.

46. Charlotte M. Porter, in *The Eagle’s Nest: Natural History and American Ideas, 1812–1842* (University, AL.: University of Alabama Press, 1986), pp. 81–82,

125–134, and *passim*: describes the privations and professional slights experienced by field naturalists as they became increasingly upstaged by the rise of organized science. On Bartram's nickname, see his *Travels* (1791; rpt. New York: Dover, 1928), p. 200. See Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 56, for a discussion of the oddly (and to her deceptively) innocent and impotent persona in traditional natural history writing.

47. Henry Salt, *Richard Jefferies: A Study* (London: Swan Sonnenschein; New York: Macmillan, 1894), p. 10.

48. Thoreau, "Wild Apples," in *Excursions and Poems*, ed. Bradford Torrey and Francis H. Allen (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1906), pp. 317–318.

49. Christ, *The Finer Optic*, pp. 19, 63.

50. Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 edition, line 1040.

51. John Canady, *Mainstreams of Modern Art* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), p. 293.

52. Walt Whitman, "To Think of Time," in *Leaves of Grass*, 1855 edition, lines 131–132.

53. I owe this analogy to Joseph Wiesenfarth, who is not to be held accountable for the inferences I draw from it.

54. Three particularly suggestive discussions of environmental awareness as a form of culture are John Elder, *Imagining the Earth: The Poetry and the Vision of Nature* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Gary Snyder, "The Etiquette of Freedom" and subsequent essays in *The Practice of the Wild* (San Francisco: North Point, 1990); and the title essay and several other discussions in David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

55. See for example Elder, *Imagining the Earth*, pp. 40ff.

56. Wendell Berry, *Recollected Essays*, quoted by Elder, *Imagining the Earth*, p. 60.

57. The most intelligent bioregionalist statement I have seen is Snyder, *The Practice of the Wild*; for a popular account of the history and nature of the idea, see Kirkpatrick Sale, *Dwellers in the Land: The Bioregional Vision* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1985).

58. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Complete Poetical Works* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1893), p. 297.

59. T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921), in *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, 1950), p. 247. A lively history of the loss of experiential reciprocity with nature is Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World: A History of the Modern Sensibility* (New York: Pantheon, 1983). The two losses are related. Although Eliot concentrates on what he takes to be the divorce of sensuous and intellectual sensibility among the literary classes and Thomas focuses on English social history from the Renaissance through the early stages of industrialization, both chart a divorce of cognitive knowledge from sensuous apprehension.

60. "Aftermath" and "rowen" were used figuratively as early as the Renaissance but the primary connotation was agricultural until modern times, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*. In fairness to contemporary readers, I should concede that Longfellow can be held partially responsible for presentist under-reading of his poem. After all, he did choose to construct his tableau from highly generalized typic images. If his ghost were to accuse us of premature metaphorizing, we could reply that he asked for it. We might further chide him, as Raymond Williams chides most British pastoralists, for being almost as alienated as ourselves from the labor he represents, since the work of mowing is never described.

61. In an interview, Barry Lopez explains his interest in the relation between language and landscape on similar grounds: "What I am striving to do is to assist the reader in the quest to understand landscape as not only something that is living but something that includes us and upon which we are subtly dependent" (Kenneth Margolis, "Paying Attention: An Interview with Barry Lopez," *Orion*, 9, no. 3 [Summer 1990]: 50).

62. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Eng.: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 89.

63. Eric Gullichsen and Randal Walsler, "Cyberspace: Experiential Computing," quoted in Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Reality* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 191.

64. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulations*, trans. Paul Foss, Paul Patton, and Philip Beitchman (New York: Semiotext[e], 1983), pp. 88, 141, 140. See also Albert Borgmann's critique of VR as "instrumental hyperreality" in *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 82–86.

65. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism: or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 38–39 and *passim*.

66. "Virtual Reality: How a Computer-Generated World Could Change the Real World," *Business Week*, 5 October 1992, 98.

67. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, p. 86.

68. Hence Ruskin's third law of drawing, "that nothing is ever seen perfectly, but only by fragments, and under various conditions of obscurity" (*Elements of Drawing*, in *Works*, 15: 120). What I have claimed for writing can also, however, be claimed of still photography; see for example Wright Morris, *Time Pieces: Photographs, Writing, and Memory* (New York: Aperture, 1989), in which Morris assuages his recurring worries about the photographic image's power to displace reality by stressing "what continues to elude us" (p. 140).

4. Walden's Environmental Projects

1. Thoreau's first problem as a would-be reader of nature, Robert Milder notes, "was that Thoreau in the 1840s lacked the skills to do it" (*Reimagining Thoreau*