GETTING BACK TO THE GARDEN:
RHETORICAL MYTHOS
AND THE DAMMING OF HETCH HETCHY

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

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1999

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a rhetorical analysis and reconstructive history of an early debate in American environmentalism. It specifically focuses on the ways in which rhetorical *mythos* was invoked by two rhetorical communities in the debate over the damming of the Hetch Hetchy valley in the Sierra Nevadas in order to supply water for the city of San Francisco. The Hetch Hetchy debate, which was prominent in national politics and journalism from 1906-1913, was a defining moment for American environmentalism. It made apparent a deep rift between utilitarian Conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot (who supported the dam project as an efficient use of natural resources) and Preservationists such as John Muir (who bitterly opposed the project as a blasphemous assault on sacred land). Prior to the Hetch Hetchy debate, the differences between Conservationists and Preservationists often went unnoticed; both worked together in lobbying Congress to set aside national forest reserves and they conjointly raised national consciousness about diminishing wild land. As a result, they were often perceived by the public to have complementary, if not identical, goals, and both groups were seen as defenders of wilderness. The proposed dam exposed the two communities’ fundamental disagreements about the value and status of wilderness, disagreements that continue to define public policy decisions today. In this dissertation, I explore the
importance of rhetorical *mythos* to both these communities' arguments, with two primary goals in mind: 1) to illustrate the importance of myth in rhetoric, especially the rhetoric of wilderness, in shaping available arguments. 2) to show how the Preservationists failed to effectively employ their own *mythos* in the debate and how this failure rendered many of their arguments ineffective. Students of American environmentalism and foe alike locate the preservation of wilderness at the very heart of the environmental movement. My exploration of the topic aims to contribute to the debates over wilderness we carry with us into the next millennium, while also adding to our understanding of rhetoric and its use of myth.
Dedicated to my Grandmother

Bettie Ruth Martin
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all I would like to thank my committee members: Brenda Brueggemann, Andrea Lunsford, and Lewis Ulman, for encouraging and supporting me in an untraditional and often untidy dissertation. Brenda has seen this project evolve from its beginning, and I can’t thank her enough for all the kindness (and occasional appropriate toughness) through which she has helped me not only as a writer but as a friend. Andrea’s confidence in me and my project has often kept me going when I felt like I was going nowhere. Most of all, I want to thank my advisor and friend, Louie, for the countless hours he has spent reading drafts, responding to drafts, and talking to me over the last several years. I know that at times he has probably been exasperated with my style of work; I only hope he now thinks his patience was well placed.

I also want to thank my good friends who over the years, and especially in the last few months, have helped me retain the serenity and security to finish this project. My friend from childhood, Richard Barrow, has been a rock for me for the last seventeen years; some of the ideas in this dissertation come straight out of our midnight conversations out in the oil fields—he knows what I’m talking about. I want to thank Terry Barrow, as well, for her friendship and, especially, for a recent conversation that helped me get the last of this dissertation completed. Melissa Goldthwaite ties Richard
for the "best listener I've ever known award" and her quiet understanding has helped me through difficulties more than once. My good friends Monica Brown and Jeff Berglund have gone just before me in the dissertation process (and in other journeys) and I can't thank them enough for their advice and support. I also want to thank Jim Fredal and Brenda (again) for their friendship and for sharing their kids with me; Karl and Esther I want to thank for reminding me of the joy of play and for helping me remember the things that really count as I worked on this project. Mike and Gilda Busch have provided a lot of encouragement over the years and I'd like to thank them too. I've known and admired Les Tannenbaum for years, but in the last few months he has become a truly invaluable friend and a major contributor to this dissertation's completion.

I cherish my family and their unconditional encouragement of my ambitions over the years: even though my path has taken me far from home, they have never been anything other than supportive. They too, in the last few months, have reminded what family can really mean, and I love them all: Lori, Randy, Kim, Rodney, Meagan, Connor, Joshua, McKenna, Jackie, Mamaw Stacy, Donna, Leroy; and most of all, my parents, Gary and Janie Stacy, whose sacrifices and love for me could never be repaid.

More than anyone else, I want to thank Melinda Turnley for all the love, support, and patience she has shown me in the past eleven years and for the courage, honesty and strength she is teaching me by example right now. Although our paths are diverging, we will always be family. Thank you, Melinda.
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INTRODUCTION

“Wilderness,” as this dissertation will illustrate, is an elusive concept. It defies easy definition and escapes most attempts to contain it. The word itself is wild. Legal definitions exist and have profound impact on land use, but I, like most people, don’t remember the legal definitions when I think of wilderness; I remember the wild places I have known. I have had the opportunity, through travel and my life as migrant academic, to know many of this nation’s most celebrated wilderness areas. But my first wilderness was never on any calendar or coffee table book—it was right out my back door.

After having spent the first twelve years of my life in a largely paved suburb of Houston, Texas, my family moved out of the city to a small, half-rural town called Mont Belvieu and into a house near the edge of a large wood. Our house was on the southern edge of the Big Thicket—literally, on the edge. Walking out the front door of our house heading south, I would be on the coastal prairie, a thin margin of oak dotted grassland between our front yard and the Trinity Bay on the Gulf of Mexico a few miles south. Stepping out the back door, though, I would soon be in the East Texas Piney Woods—one of the most extensive and dense conifer forests on the continent. My part of the Thicket was just a four or five square mile strip along Old River—not a large piece of land, but size is
relative to landscape. In the Thicket, covering two miles can take five hours of
scrambling over Cypress knees, across bayous, and around snaky bogs.

And I did a lot of scrambling in those woods. Sometimes I’d go out with my
older brother or a friend, but most of the time I was by myself; thinking back now, those
hours in the woods were probably my first experience of real solitude. I learned how to
be alone there. I learned how to be still. I practiced, without knowing it, how to go softly
and leave no trace. I learned to let the whitetail deer, squirrels, raccoons, and swamp
rabbits come to me. Or rather, go about their own worthy business with little or no
regard for me. Like most southern boys, my first encounters with the native fauna were
through the sight of a .22 or past the bead of a .20 gauge. But, as John Muir would put it,
I eventually outgrew that. More and more, I’d return home with an unfired gun.

I became very possessive of my woods. They were my woods. I was never sure
whom they belonged to by deed, and I didn’t care. They were mine. Mine by right of
familiarity. No one knew them like I did. Occasionally hunters passed through, and
some of the neighbor kids made occasional and shallow forays into the thicket. I spent
many entire days and some long nights in my woods. I knew every foot of that land, and
I loved it. This wasn’t, however, an earthly paradise. As Scott Russell Sanders says of
his childhood home, it was a land of difficult love; it resisted love. Jungle heat eight
months or more of the year, swarms of mosquitoes, chiggers, ticks, poison ivy, fire ants,
devil’s bullwhip (a vicious vine with thorns sufficient to open an artery), yellow-jackets,
red wasps, water moccasins, copperheads, coral snakes, timber rattlers, skunks, snapping
turtles, feral dogs, foul-tempered wild hogs, and a few six feet or longer alligators around to keep me honest. So what was to love?

Now I can see that I loved it for many of the same reasons others have valued wilderness in this nation. It was a proving ground for a young boy trying to figure out how to be a man, and usually failing at it quite publicly. It provided a measure of freedom for a boy who had a room of his own, but didn’t yet have a life of his own. It was an escape for a boy without a driver’s license, and later for a young man with a license, but nowhere to go. It was a refuge for a kid who never quite found a place for himself in his small Texas town.

But, most of all, it just was. Long before I encountered such lofty terms as “intrinsic value,” “ethical extensionism” or “biocentrism,” I loved that land because it was what it was and had been what it was for countless millennia. Aside from the concrete shell of a defunct pumping station along the river, a dilapidated hog pen in a beautiful copse of live oak, one abandoned water well, and three narrow, clear-cut “pipeline clearings,” these woods were much the same as they would have appeared to a Karankawa Indian trapping catfish or a shipwrecked, lost and hopeless Spanish conquistador. Its value, for me, was that it was unchanged, while the highways, petrochemical refineries, rice fields and shopping malls had so thoroughly transformed the rest of my local environment.

My respect was the respect for something secure and abiding. Like most adolescents, from thirteen to nineteen I changed faster than the weather. But the woods stayed the same. Aside from a few lightning-felled loblollies, those woods were, to all
appearances, the same when I graduated from high school as when I started middle
school. They provided continuity, a haven from change. These woods were permanent.

Or so I thought. Like so many "My First Wilderness" narratives, this doesn’t
have a happy ending. Loss has become the expected dénouement of such stories. After I
finished college and moved away from the Texas Gulf Coast, the building of new homes
adjacent to my parents’ neighborhood slowly, but inexorably, began eating away at my
woods along Old River. Last year, 1998, marked the final demise of my woods. A new
golf course has opened and people who have lived years nearby and never been in those
woods have started knocking little white balls over the artificially watered and chemically
fertilized greens and fairways of non-native grass. The transformation is complete. The
trees have been cut, the creeks contained, the bogs drained, and bulldozers have relocated
tons of earth to create sterilized hills and hummocks where once were swamps and pine
thickets teeming with organic life and rich decay.

The building of the golf course prompted the inevitable strife and petty contention
of small town politics—dissent over cost, taxes, property values and membership fees.
But, to my knowledge, no one raised an objection based on the value of those woods as
undeveloped land. Government agencies were involved, by law, to oversee wetlands
protection and replacement, but no hearings were held, no town meetings called, to
discuss whether these woods should be left "wild." Then again, this land wasn’t
perceived as wilderness at all by the community surrounding it. Wilderness is something
you see on vacation and appears dark green on maps. This was just unused property, land
whose value lay only in its potential to be developed. There were no “wilderness”
debates. The rhetoric surrounding the building of this golf course was prompted by fiscal, not environmental, exigencies. Where I knew a small piece of wilderness—land only faintly altered by human industry and valuable for that very reason, others saw a golf course waiting to be born. Wilderness is, indeed, largely a matter of perception.

That wilderness was not valued for its own intrinsic worth in my hometown should, according to Roderick Nash, be neither surprising nor disappointing. He points out that “the appreciation of wilderness must be understood as recent, revolutionary, and incomplete” (Wilderness xvii). In both the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, wilderness was/is most often associated with darkness, confusion, fear, punishment and chaos. In the Judeo-Christian tradition it has been almost uniformly conceived as the wellspring of evil, the abode of Satan and his demons. I will discuss the legacy of these fears later, but it should be noted at the outset that wilderness as a positive concept is truly a new thing under the sun, and it is understandable that entire communities might still lack a vocal advocate for wilderness. As Nash points out: “The ancient prejudices are slow to disappear; the old fears die hard. Rather than being discouraged at public indifference, contemporary wilderness advocates might remember that in terms of human history they are riding the crest of a very recent wave” (Nash Wilderness xvii). Of course the people of my hometown didn’t destroy those woods because they consciously believed them evil; but traditional, negative associations of wilderness certainly contribute to the perception of “unused” land as wasteland, worthless land. In this country, we not only disagree about how we should value wilderness, we even disagree about what counts as wilderness.
Part of the semantic and conceptual evasiveness of wilderness lies in the fact that the term designates both a "real" physical place (experienced with our senses) and a cultural space (determined by our stories, myths, and other lore about it). I posit that our valuations of wilderness have changed and can change only to the degree to which our shared language (and its attendant assumptions, prohibitions, and prescriptions) about wilderness is amenable to modification, especially our mythic orientation towards wilderness. While this language and the cultural spaces it delineates have profound impact upon the physical places we experience, they exist separately (though not, I will argue, independently) of them.

Nash, in his study of national wilderness values, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, points out that "Wilderness has a deceptive concreteness at first glance. The difficulty is that while the word is a noun, it acts like an adjective... The term designates a quality, as the "ness" suggests, that produces a certain mood or feeling in a given individual and, as a consequence, may be assigned by that person to a specific place" (1). He goes so far as to suggest that "There is no specific, material object that is wilderness," that our perceptions of "wild" land are entirely subjective and "[b]ecause of this subjectivity, a universally acceptable definition of wilderness is elusive. One man’s wilderness might be another’s roadside picnic ground" (1). Or embryonic golf course.

"Wilderness" is, at least in part, an abstraction, a category, a container for any number of competing and contradictory attitudes, and it is this aspect of wilderness that Nash stresses in his study. Nash goes a bit too far though in insisting upon the independence of our perceptions from the actual places that we perceive. He concludes
that: “In the last analysis, wilderness is a matter of perception, part of the geography of
the mind” (333). I will argue strenuously in this dissertation that conflicts over
wilderness are rooted in our divergent perceptions of wilderness, and in this I agree with
Nash; however, I also insist that our perceptions of wilderness do not arise independently
of wilderness as “reality,” as a geographical, geological, biological, site and knowable to
more knowers than just the human. That is, our constructions of wilderness as a cultural
space, as an intellectual category, are restrained by wilderness as a physical space, a place
that we can hear, see, feel, smell, and taste, and other beings perceive in ways we can
only imagine.

To better explain, I’ll borrow a distinction used by Donna Haraway in relation to
the larger term “nature.” She sees “nature” as both topos and tropos. As tropos, nature
works as a trope—a “figure, construction, artifact, movement, displacement.” This
abstraction from nature necessarily conditions our perceptions of nature. As she puts it,
“Nature [for humans] cannot preexist its construction” (“Promise” 296). This is closely
aligned with Nash’s understanding of wilderness. She, however, adds that Nature is also
Topos—a place that we can access “to order our discourse, to compose our memory.” In
this sense, physical Nature acts as a rhetorical commonplace, a “topic for [the]
consideration of common themes” (296), and from this store we derive our tropes about
nature. Haraway’s paradigm insists that physical places and conceptual spaces, though
distinctive, do not and cannot exist independently of one another.

In this dissertation I am preoccupied with wilderness as a human cultural
construct, as a topic of rhetoric. But I want to be clear from the beginning that I don’t
hold wilderness to be merely a human fabrication. More players than just the human participate in the construction of a wilderness. Our experiences, prejudices, assumptions, hopes, and fears as humans shape the ways in which we perceive and represent wilderness, but they do not bring wilderness into being, and they can only indirectly make wilderness non-existent—i.e. we can’t “think away” corporeal wilderness, however much our thinking can call forth the all too palpable chainsaws, bulldozers, and dams to complete the thought. In other words, I again agree with Haraway that “nature is made, but not entirely by humans; it is a co-construction among humans and non-humans” (297). Quite simply, when a tree falls in a forest, the sound it makes has nothing to do with whether humans are within earshot.

Having made this plea for the material reality of wilderness, it seems necessary to begin to explore just what it is, in all its slipperiness. As Neil Evernden says, we cannot begin to save something until we understand what it is we are trying to save (xii). One goal of this dissertation is to problematize our accepted notions of wilderness, and I want to begin that pursuit here by looking at two definitions, one from a widely used American dictionary, the other from a government document. The American Heritage Dictionary, 3rd ed. defines wilderness as: 1. An unsettled, uncultivated region left in its natural condition, especially: a. A large wild tract of land covered with dense vegetation or forests. b. An extensive area, such as a desert or an ocean, that is barren or empty; a waste. c. A piece of land set aside to grow wild. 2. Something characterized by bewildering vastness, perilousness, or unchecked profusion: the wilderness of the city; the wilderness of counterespionage; a wilderness of voices. The Wilderness Act of 1964
describes it as “an area where earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man”; lands designated wilderness are to be “affected primarily by nature.”

Many of the ambiguities accompanying our understandings of wilderness surface right away in these definitions. First of all we see the unquestioned assertion of a dichotomy between “the human” and “the natural.” The *Wilderness Act* is explicit in granting affective agency to “nature” and evoking the negative verb “trammel” in relation to potential human activity in the wilderness. This association of wilderness with the “natural” and the implied association of the human with the “unnatural” underlies many of our notions of wilderness and, as I argue, seriously undermines our ethical considerations of wilderness and of our environment as a whole.

We also see evidence here of Nash’s observation that wilderness, while ostensibly a noun, acts as an adjective, and an associated tendency for definitions of wilderness to be somewhat circular. Wilderness is “a piece of land set aside to grow wild.” Or, a “wild tract of land.” What is a “wild tract of land”? No doubt, a wilderness. Defining “wild,” as will become clear, is fraught with the same perils as defining wilderness. We also see in the dictionary definition how negative connotations linger in wilderness. It can be barren, empty, bewildering, perilous and a waste. It can also slip easily into employment as a descriptor of decidedly “unnatural” environments: “The wilderness of counter-espionage.” Finally, we see in both of the above definitions an association of wilderness with vastness. This association has had enormous ethical and political consequences. Environmental organizations can sometimes effectively rally their memberships to oppose a dam threatening a vast canyon with inundation, but
every year hundreds of golf courses displace “postage-stamp” wildlands without a whisper of opposition.

Through this dissertation, I hope to articulate a more viable understanding of wilderness, but since this will be an understanding developed gradually and cumulatively from the histories I reconstruct and the rhetoric I explore, here I’ll only offer a negative definition. Building upon the objections I raise above to the popular understandings, let me state what I think a definition of wilderness should avoid: 1) It should not reify the false binary of nature/human. 2) It should embrace and capitalize on the relationship between “wilderness” and “wildness” rather than relegating them to a pointless and cyclical semantic dependency. 3) It should avoid the association of wilderness with “appropriate size.” 4) While recognizing the ultimate nonsense of semantic neutrality, it should be large enough to contain both beauty and terror, both hope and fear—realizing that these are human apprehensions added ex post facto to the ecological reality of wilderness.

These apprehensions and fears, while not constitutive of the material “reality” of wilderness, are, nevertheless, very real. Although we do not create wilderness through language, language is the primary, and at times exclusive, mode for our knowing and experiencing wilderness. My argument rests upon the assumption that we primarily know wilderness through the language we have available to think/talk/write about it. This language can, and has, taken such diverse forms as myths, slogans, proverbs, and scientific reports. Our language about wilderness changes and is changed by our cultural relationships with wilderness. As Max Oelschlager puts it, “The history of the idea of
wilderness is not all sound and fury signifying nothing, but intimately related to the evolving character of culture as human nature has articulated itself in particular places and times. In context, ideas of wilderness... appear as historically inevitable” (5). Carolyn Merchant concurs: “A view of nature can be seen as a projection of human perceptions of self and society onto the cosmos” (69). In this dissertation, I hope to illustrate how our human perceptions have been projected onto and infused into our notions of wilderness, and how a better understanding of these projections might benefit both us and the wilderness of which we are (sometimes) a part.

I see my project as an opportunity to combine my interest in rhetorical theory and criticism (and its consequent pedagogical applications) with my personal involvement in environmental ethics and politics, specifically the ethics and politics of wilderness preservation. I feel fortunate to be pursuing this project in the late 1990’s, as this work has been made significantly easier (perhaps even made possible) by the appearance of ecocriticism as a distinct field of English studies. Ecocriticism emerged in the early 1990’s as an environmentally-centered theoretical and critical approach to the study and teaching of literature. While other academic disciplines, such as history, philosophy, and law, began their “greening” in the early 1970s, English departments had been rather lazy in assuming an ecological perspective. This negligence in taking up the task has been mitigated somewhat by an energetic effort among many scholars in the last ten years to reconsider canonical texts, to rediscover marginalized works and to begin articulating an ecological theory of literature.
Some ecocritics have turned to canonical texts and have reread them in terms of their representations and valuations of non-human nature, others have looked at "setting" as an often-neglected narrative feature of well-known texts. Still others have addressed the "absences" of and "silences" about non-human nature in established literary texts. Concomitant with this revisionary effort, has been a project of rediscovery, in which critics have reconsidered marginalized texts, such as Mary Austin’s Land of Little Rain. Just as feminist critics have demonstrated that texts by and about women have been marginalized because of inherent misogyny in the creation and maintenance of the western canon, ecocritics have argued that the western canon is often biased against texts that take a biocentric, rather than a fully anthropocentric, worldview. Along with this revisionary literary project, ecocritics consider contemporary representations of nature in a variety of discourses, taking as their subject matter texts as diverse as novels, environmental impact statements, car commercials, and song lyrics.

Rather than offering a particular and precise methodology for the study of literature, ecocriticism suggests a distinctive orientation towards texts. Like ecology itself, which focuses on the interrelationships among life forms and their habitats, ecocriticism “takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature” (Glotfelty xix). With this basic orientation, ecocritics have employed numerous and diverse methodologies to pursue and illuminate these interconnections. One methodology, pursued by scholars such as Stuart C. Brown, Carl G. Herndl, M. Jimmie Killingsworth, Carolyn Miller, Jacqueline S. Palmer, Randall Roorda, and H. Lewis Ulman, is that of applying rhetorical
theory and criticism to environmental texts and topics. These scholars see environmental discourse as ripe for rhetorical analysis. While the range of these ecocritics’ work is broad, they share an interest in exploring how rhetors’ strategic intentions and audiences’ equally strategic expectations shape and determine the “action” of discourse within specific social contexts. This attention to the social element of discourse (as opposed to a more “romantic” concern with how an exceptional individual privately experiences nature) seems especially important given the politicization of “nature” in the United States over the last century (Herndl and Brown 7). It is within this emergent field of rhetorical ecocriticism that I locate my own scholarship on American wilderness.

Through reconstructing a specific debate about wilderness in this country, I intend to explore the ways in which the same rhetorical context can be divergently perceived (and represented) as different and distinctive “situations” by its various participants. I expect to demonstrate that rhetorical situations are neither objectively and consistently “real” for all participants, nor are they radically, individually, subjective; rather, I will argue that rhetorical situations are indeed “constructed,” but our constructions are constrained by language and Reality itself; therefore interpretive possibilities are multiple, but limited. Those constraints, I will suggest, are exacted primarily by an individual’s identification with a larger rhetorical community and its mythos. This paradigm might offer a middle path between strict absolutism and radical relativism for the study of discursive contexts.

While pursuing this goal, I concomitantly am attempting to reconstruct the conceptual understandings and rhetorical uses of the term “wilderness” which emerged at
the turn of the twentieth century in debates over the appropriate use and status of the remaining, undeveloped federal lands in the West. To achieve these goals I am specifically focusing on the rhetoric of two distinct rhetorical communities which emerged around the turn of the century and the debate in which they engaged over the damming of the Hetch Hetchy Valley in the Sierras to supply water for the city of San Francisco. This debate, which was prominent in national politics and journalism from 1908 to 1913, was a defining issue for American environmentalism. It made apparent a deep rift between utilitarian conservationists such as Gifford Pinchot (who supported the dam project as an efficient use of natural resources) and preservationists such as John Muir (who bitterly opposed the project as a blasphemous assault on sacred land). The project thus should contribute both to our understanding of mythos in rhetoric and to our understanding of “wilderness,” a significant and contested concept throughout U.S. cultural and political history, and a concept that we are still debating at the turn of the millennium.

In Chapter 1, I introduce some of the rhetorical assumptions and perspectives that will inform the dissertation throughout. Chapter 2 focuses on the Preservationist perspective as expressed in the philosophy of John Muir, and in Chapter 3, I look at Gifford Pinchot as a representative of the Conservationist outlook. Chapter 4 centers directly on the Hetch Hetchy debate, where the Conservationist and Preservationist perspectives reached a bitter impasse. In a concluding essay, I offer some thoughts on our incommensurable wilderness values and our need for a more viable understanding of wild land in this country.
CHAPTER 1

RHETORICAL COMMUNITIES AND MITHOS

On July 16th, 1998 officials from the U.S. Park Service, the City of San Francisco and the Army Corps of Engineers gathered on the causeway of the Hetch Hetchy Dam in Yosemite National Park to celebrate the dam’s 75th anniversary. The reservoir east of the dam, with the still flowing, though now invisible, Toulmne River rushing deep below it, brimmed with the meltwaters from an exceptionally heavy winter snowfall. The deafening surge through the sluice gates on the west side of the dam threw off enormous rainbow clouds of mist as the Toulmne reconstituted itself in the canyon below and rushed towards its rendezvous with the San Joaquin in California’s Great Central Valley. On top of the dam, officials and minor dignitaries of the federal, state and municipal governments recited the many benefits the dam had bestowed upon California, especially upon the citizens of San Francisco. Some of the park rangers at the ceremony had trouble paying attention to the speakers at the podium; they had been up all the night before keeping careful watch over the dam, for it was believed that some had come not to praise, but to bury the dam—and to liberate the Toulmne.
Among the uninvited guests at the ceremony were contingents from Earth First! and other environmental organizations. Earth First!ers have made it clear over the years that they would be happy to see every dam in the American west blown to bits, and a few have been arrested for conspiring to do it. Although the rangers at the Hetch Hetchy ceremony foiled no would-be saboteurs, the Park Service was not being overvigilant in protecting the dam. Dams, and the once wild “ghost” rivers they shroud beneath their reservoirs, have become a cause célèbre among American environmentalists; for many, dams incarnate, in their monolithic concrete presence, human arrogance, which would subjugate wild nature to its over-reaching pride. The passionate enmity dams provoke is very real. Any public ceremony at any dam site in the west is sure to be a lightning rod for both defenders and critics of these vast, publicly funded, earth-transforming projects.

If we view the dam’s anniversary as a discursive situation, an occasion for rhetoric, we note right away that the situation accommodated and encouraged not one, but at least two distinct epideictic responses. The dam supporters, responding from a conservationist perspective, saw the occasion as one of praise; while the opponents, inheritors of a preservationist outlook, perceived blame as the appropriate response. One incident evoked at least two responses. Kenneth Burke holds that an event “takes on character, meaning, significance... in accordance with the contexts in which we experience it” (Permanence 14). The key point here is that a singular “event” is really a social fiction, if experienced by more than one perceiver, because there are as many contexts as there are participants. It would be more accurate to speak of a public event as a set of concurrent, but discrete, events. This claim does not, however, imply interpretive
free-for-alls. Most attendees at this ceremony responded to the situation in accordance with their greater or lesser identification with the *mythos* of two rhetorical communities, that of the preservationist or conservationist. In the following dissertation, I explore the mythic orientations of these rhetorical communities and consider how the *mythos* of the two communities shaped and limited their rhetorical responses to the damming of the Toulmne seventy-five years earlier.

**The Multiple Situations of Rhetoric**

The relationship between discourse and reality, between our world and our words about it, has been a perennial site of contention in the rhetorical tradition. Countless definitions of rhetoric have been offered over the past twenty-five hundred years, but a common element among most is that rhetoric seeks to describe and alter our world(s). We see much less agreement when it comes to how (and how closely) rhetoric *corresponds* to reality. Some commentators have argued for an objective and stable relationship between “good” rhetoric and reality; others have held that rhetoric, by its very nature, has a merely contingent, and therefore subjective, relationship to the reality it attempts to change. It is outside the scope of this dissertation to trace this disagreement through the centuries; rather, I highlight the issue by considering three contemporary contributions to it: Lloyd Bitzer’s, “The Rhetorical Situation,” which insists on an objectively real and consensually knowable reality for all rational rhetorical participants; Richard Vatz’s “The Myth of the Rhetorical Situation,” which argues for radical subjectivity and the rhetorical constructedness of reality; and Carolyn Miller’s, “Genre as
Social Action," which contains a useful critique of both the Bitzerian and Vatzian paradigms. This dissertation contends that an attention to the mythic orientation of various rhetorical situations is crucial to understanding how situations can seem both objective and subjective, both factual and phenomenological.

Bitzer reiterates a widely accepted postulate that rhetoric is primarily pragmatic and utilitarian, more a tool than an art: "[I]t comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world; it performs some task. In short, rhetoric is a mode of altering reality" (302). Key to Bitzer's understanding of rhetorical situation is his assertion that this pragmatic function of rhetoric is always invited by the very situation it seeks to alter: "a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance" (302). Situations summon rhetors to remedy the exigence. Agency is thus shifted away from the rhetor or audience and given to the "situation" itself; this is one of the most contentious claims made by Bitzer. According to Bitzer's model, the proposed damming of Hetch Hetchy, rather than being responded to by rhetors, called forth its rhetors and determined their rhetorical responses.

Bitzer defines a rhetorical situation as "a natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance" (303). Bitzer sees this complex context (he never explains what he means by "natural") as so integral to rhetorical practice that it should actually constitute the core of rhetorical studies: "So controlling is situation that we should consider it the very ground of rhetorical activity..." (303). For Bitzer, rhetoric is always a response to a situation and the significance of a
discursive act is always derived from its situation (303-304). Situation calls forth, gives importance, determines the fitness, and regulates rhetoric. Because he elevates situation to such importance, it is, of course, essential that situation be objective, singular, stable, and knowable; otherwise, rhetorical criticism would be all but impossible.

Bitzer goes on to provide a more developed definition of rhetorical situation by elaborating upon its key term, exigence: for Bitzer, an exigence is a wrong that needs to be righted or a lack that needs to be filled—and quickly: “Any exigence is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be” (304). Bitzer distinguishes between exigence in general and rhetorical exigence; the former encompasses all “imperfections” experienced by humans, including those that come about by necessity (harsh winters, floods, etc.), while the former includes only those imperfections which can be remedied by the intervention of human action. Furthermore, a rhetorical exigence implies communal effort; Bitzer holds that the actions performed by a single person to remedy a wrong would not be rhetorical because discourse is not necessary to carry out the action. In sum, rhetorical exigence must be “capable of positive modification and positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse” (304).

Bitzer realizes that sometimes multiple exigencies prompt a single rhetorical response, but he holds that “there will be at least one controlling exigence which functions as the organizing principle: it specifies the audience to be addressed and the change to be effected” (305). For Bitzer, exigence prompts, directs, and organizes rhetorical responses, thus diminishing the discursive agency of the human participants in
discourse. Bitzer goes so far as to claim that “speakers intentions and audiences expectations are both determined by situation [my emphasis] (305). Bitzer concedes that in any given rhetorical situation the controlling exigence might be clearly comprehended or only vaguely perceived; it may be real or unreal (thus he says that an imagined exigence can have just as much power as a “true” one); it may be important or trivial; it may be resolvable through discourse or it might resist discursive solution—all that is important is that it be responded to in discourse (305). This might seem that Bitzer is allowing for multiple, diverse and subjective perceptions of exigence, but this is not the case.

Despite the apparent allowance for subjectivity made in the above statements, Bitzer flatly insists that “the constituents of rhetorical situation [including its exigence] are located in reality, are objective and publicly observable historic facts in the world we experience, are therefore available for scrutiny by an observer or critic who attends to them” (305). One of the implications of this objectivist program is that it straightjackets the range of “appropriate” rhetorical responses. It suggests that a participant can either correctly observe the “real” situation and respond to it fittingly or misapprehend the situation and respond inappropriately. In the case of Hetch Hetchy, this would force the “observer or critic” attending to it to scrutinize the facts and decide which exigence, that perceived by the conservationists or that recognized by the preservationists, was “located in reality.”

In contrast to Bitzer’s “objective and publicly knowable” situations, Richard Vatz posits a private and phenomenological perspective of speaker and audiences. Vatz insists
that Bitzer’s objective situation is merely “the fitting of a scene into a category or categories found in the head of the observer” (154). He suggests that rhetorical situations (and, by extension, reality itself) cannot “have a nature independent of the perception of its observer or independent of the rhetoric he chooses to characterize it” (154). He argues that Bitzer’s perspective requires a naïve realist philosophy of meaning that requires us to believe that a rhetorical situation has its own discrete existence, “independent” of rhetors and audiences (155). This naïveté, Vatz claims, leads to an equally naïve belief that the “positive modification” necessary to redress an exigence is clear and the same for all participants. The perennial discord of human history would seem to argue against this. If exigence were objective, obvious, and consistently observable to all, why would history be marked by such contention? Why has universal understanding and cooperation not prevailed, given all the verbalizing humans have done about the problems of our world? Why would rhetorical studies, according to Burke, be concerned with “the state of Babel, after the fall”? Why would we study rhetoric at all?

Vatz directly counters Bitzer by arguing that “meaning is not intrinsic in events, facts, people or situations nor are facts publicly observable” (156). Vatz turns to Burke’s notion of “terministic screens” (the notion that our sense of reality is determined by the words we have available to discuss it). Rather than reality being unitary, and monolithic, approachable by all “rational” people, from all walks of life and all cultural positions at all times, Vatz insists that “the world is a scene of inexhaustible events which all compete to impinge on what Burke calls our ‘sliver of reality’” (156). Rhetorical situations, thus, are not realistically objective, but rather, creatively subjective; a rhetor
creates reality by her artistic selection of “facts” about it and by the language she has at her disposal to talk about it (157). Therefore, in reaction to Bitzer’s diminishing the agency of rhetors, Vatz reclaims that agency and leaves situation itself powerless:

“[M]eaning is not discovered in situations but created by rhetors” (158) and “situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surrounds them or creates them” (159). Vatz anticipates, and effectively heads off the claim that such a view leads to a morally relativistic rhetoric; in fact, Vatz argues that his subjective view of situation actually leads to a more ethical rhetoric, for “to view rhetoric as a creation [of the rhetor] rather than a reflector of reality clearly increases the rhetor’s moral responsibility” (158).

Although I agree with this claim, I cannot accept the dichotomous extremity of Vatz’s understanding of rhetorical subjectivity; he seems too eager to posit a model neatly (and merely) antipodal to Bitzer’s; he is overly strenuous in his refutation. While Bitzer places too much agency in the situation, at the expense of its human participants, Vatz would allow rhetors to conjure up situations at their own whim, thus giving total agency to rhetors and effectively denying situation any influence on rhetoric. In Vatz’ phenomenological model, the rhetoric of support and protest expressed at the Hetch Hetchy ceremony arose independently and freely in the mind of each participant, without regard to generic precedent or group affiliation. Vatz’ paradigm promotes a romantic, asocial understanding of rhetoric that leaves little room for the presence of historical or societal influence.

Bitzer and Vatz’s theoretical quarrel exemplifies polar positions held on rhetoric’s relation to reality.8 I am interested, however, in a perspective on the
correspondence of rhetoric to reality that offers a version of rhetoric and its situations more attuned to the power of mythos within rhetorical communities. Carolyn Miller contributes to this mythic, community-oriented perspective in her revision of Bitzer and Vatz’s views of situation, especially their notions of exigence. Miller points out that Bitzer identifies the rhetorical situation and its exigence as tangible, material attributes, and she rejects this rendering, arguing that exigence is found in the inter-subjective, symbolic realm. At the same time, she refutes Vatz and his insistence on the subjective omnipotence of the individual rhetor: “Exigence must be located in the social world, neither in a private perception nor in material circumstances” (157). In effect, Miller refutes both Bitzer and Vatz for denying the importance of discourse communities and the powerful narratives, or myths, to which they subscribe.

Miller confirms my own understanding of exigence as subjective, but constrained by social locations and relationships. Miller suggests that exigence is “a form of social knowledge—a mutual construing of objects, events, interests, and purposes that not only links them but also makes them what they are: an objectified social need” (157). The distinction here between Bitzer’s “objective” exigencies and Miller’s “objectified” exigencies is key. Bitzer’s version posits the status of a situation as an ontological “given,” while Miller argues for situations as a “mutual construing”, or social construction. Miller does not deny that situations appear as objective to their participants/observers, but she stresses that this apparent objectivity is, in fact, a consensual objectification (and simplification) of a multi-faceted semiotic structure, a
structure that includes such obviously subjective components as "interests" and "purposes."

Miller holds that interpretation is central to rhetorical action, "because human action is based on and guided by meaning, not by material causes. Before we can act, we must interpret the indeterminate material environment; we define, or determine a situation" and "at the center of action is a process of interpretation" (158). I argue that this interpretation is primarily a mythic interpretation. "Definition" and "determination" emerge as crucial terms in Miller's understanding of situational rhetoric. According to Miller, we approach each new situation by noting similarities between it and situations with which we are already familiar. In this way situations become "typified." She insists, however, that situations do not actually recur (a single situation is much too complex to ever be repeated); rather "through the process of typification... we create recurrence, analogies, similarities. What recurs is not a material situation (a real, objective, factual event) but our construal of a type" (157). As I argue below, this construal of a type, which Miller develops as genre, can also be seen as the typification of myth.

Recognizing this typification helps explain why communication so often fails, for "[s]uccessful communication would require that participants share common types..." (157). The Bitzerian model is inadequate for this very reason; it does not recognize and allow for the fact that situations recur subjectively, not objectively. Rhetorical communities are comprised of members who consistently typify situations in a like manner. Expressing our typing of a situation is a way of announcing ourselves publicly
and identifying our community allegiance: "By 'defining' a material circumstance as a particular situational type, I find a way to engage my intentions in it in a socially recognizable and interpretable way." This "provides an occasion, and thus a form, for making public our private versions of things" (158). Such publicly announced typifications not only identify participants with a community; they also serve to identify the participant as against other communities with other ways of typifying a situation.

Miller invokes Burkean support for her understanding of situations as socially constructed. Burke's attempts to comprehend "symbolic action" through human "motive," though notoriously resistant to tidy systemization, provide an indispensable vocabulary for exploring the relationship of rhetoric to reality. Especially helpful is his notion of orientation, most fully dealt with in his early work, Permanence and Change.

We discern situational patterns by means of the particular vocabulary of the cultural group into which we are born. Our minds, as linguistic products, are composed of concepts (verbally moulded) which select certain relationships as meaningful. Other groups may select other relationships as meaningful. These relationships are not reality, they are interpretations of reality—hence different frameworks of interpretation will lead to different conclusions as to what reality is. (Permanence 52)¹¹

For Burke, situational patterns are discerned according to our "orientations," which he likens to a worldview or interpretive predisposition; it is "a bundle of judgements as to how things were, how they are, and how they might be" (Permanence 24). I hold that critical access into this orientation can be gained through an attention to the ways in which myth is understood and promoted by a rhetorical community. This predisposition is especially operative in our interpretations of situation, which the mind, as Miller
argues, is eager to typify as the recurrence of an already experienced situation. Burke writes, "In the complexities of social experience, where the recurrence of 'like' situations is always accompanied by the introduction of new factors, one's total orientation may greatly influence one's judgement of likeness" (Permanence 23).

Burke makes it clear that he sees determinations of situation as fully subjective: "One is simply interpreting with the only vocabulary he knows, which involves a vocabulary of ought and ought-not, with the attendant vocabulary of praiseworthy and blameworthy" (Permanence 33), and he scoffs at any effort to locate a single, transcendent, "rational" understanding of every situation: Different "orientation[s] (each with a different theory of motives and a different theory of self-deception to go with it) suggest that one school's reason is another school's rationalization (Permanence 32)." While viewing situation as fully subjective and interpretive, Burke sees interpretation as a fully social activity, rather than the private rendering of reality that Vatz would have.

Burke, in fact, sees the function of rhetorical communities as indispensable to an understanding of situation; for him, community will is the raison d'être of language. "In its origins, language is an implement of action, a device which takes its shape by the cooperative patterns of the group that uses it" (Permanence 220). In one sense, then, a socio-linguistic category such as "English," "French," or "Navajo" might be overly broad for discussing the discursive intentions of groups whose very language (in the sense of a meaningful symbolic code) might, in some cases, be better described as "Pro-life," "Pro-choice," "Preservationist," or "Conservationist." For Burke, speech "is intensely moral--its names for objects contain the emotional overtones which give us the cues as to how
we should act towards these objects” (Permanence 225). Thus, communities not only provide us with the vocabulary at our disposal for interpreting situations, but our identification within communities provides the crucial moral shading of that vocabulary: “For in the last analysis, men do not communicate by a neutral vocabulary. In the profoundest sense, one communicates by a weighted vocabulary and the weightings are shared by his group as a whole” (Permanence 211). This suggests, perhaps distressingly, that oppositional rhetorical communities might, in a very real sense, not even be speaking the same language.13

Mythos and Rhetoric

I am most interested in exploring how rhetorical communities (or groups of interpreters) distinguish themselves from other, competing, interpretive communities through their distinct world-views. The traditional rhetorical proofs of *ethos*, *logos*, and *pathos* provide sites for this exploration, but in studying two rhetorical communities I have become convinced of the need to consider *mythos* as a fourth, less traditional, proof. According to James S. and Tita French Baumlin in “On the Psychology of the Pisteis,”

[M]yth repudiates conventional logic, which seeks to divide, to analyze, to force a singular correct meaning or choice. The mythic seeks instead to unite, to synthesize, to assert wholeness in multiple or contrasting choices and interpretations. Mythos thus offers a synthetic and analogical, as opposed to analytic mode of proof, one that discovers, indeed celebrates, the diversity of truth. (106)
The mythic treats of metaphors, images and stories that condition logic, emotions, and the influence of character. Acknowledging mythos as a proof suggests that there is persuasive capacity in rhetoric beyond the effects of persona, emotiveness, or logic. This proof is especially crucial in considering community orientations that shape interpretations of exigence and situation; for as Burke points out, "It is precisely through metaphor that our perspectives... are made—a world without metaphor would be a world without purpose" (Permanence 247). I suggest that the rhetoric of wilderness, in particular, cannot be adequately treated without acknowledging its mythic aspects, and in this dissertation I will illustrate the importance of mythos by focusing on such myths as the Temple, the Frontier, and, especially, the Garden.

Although few rhetorical scholars have treated mythos directly or fully, the Baumlins argue that its consideration is complimentary, rather than contradictory, to the rhetorical tradition:

Mythos completes the realm of discourse outlined in The Rhetorica, its capacities for synthesis complimenting particularly the analytic procedures of logos. And once placed alongside the logical, the pathetic, and the ethical, this fourth proof suggests why literary or imaginative discourse, discourse involved in narrative, mytho-poetic, or archetypal patterning, is often so moving, so persuasive, so healing, and so necessary a part of the rhetorical map of humankind's mental structure. (108)

To more fully flesh out the idea of mythos, before applying it to Preservationist and Conservationist discourse, I will look at the works of three scholars for whom myth and its relation to rhetoric is especially important: Richard Slotkin, Roderick Hart, and Walter Fisher.
Richard Slotkin, an Americanist and literary historian, has offered a comprehensive treatment of the mythology of the American frontier from 1600 to the present in a trilogy comprised of *Regeneration Through Violence*, *The Fatal Environment*, and *Gunfighter Nation*. In these books, Slotkin offers some thoughts on myth that are particularly concerned with how they function in creating and sustaining communities of like-minded individuals. Slotkin insists that myth need not be thought of as larger-than-life, as in the popular understanding of myth. In fact, he holds that myth, at least in the age of print, is conveyed from generation to generation not by venerable seers or sages reciting epics but by the accumulated efforts of ordinary writers, speakers, journalists, preachers, advertisers, and politicians. These, according to Slotkin, were the chief makers of American myths in the nineteenth century (10). ¹⁴

Although a myth need not be lofty, as in our sense of Greek myth, it always serves the same purpose that classical, biblical, or tribal myths serve. A myth “recapitulates [a] people’s experience in their land, rehearses their visions of that experience in its relations to their gods and the cosmos, and reduces both experience and vision to a paradigm” (*Fatal 6*). This reduction of experience and vision to paradigm is key to understanding Slotkin’s notion of myth and has obvious application to the myth of wilderness in the United States. While Slotkin recognizes the role of more traditionally recognized rhetorical vehicles, such as the credo, manifesto, polemic and sermon (which are typically discursive and argumentative in form) he, like Burke and the Baumlins, recognizes that there is another type of persuasion, less direct and more evocative than argument; this is the language of myth, which “is indirect, metaphorical, and narrative in
structure. It renders ideology in the form of symbol, exemplum, and fable, and poetically evokes, fantasy, memory and sentiment. The logic of myth is the logic of metaphor and narrative" (Fatal 22). I argue that our understanding of wilderness in the U.S. has as much to do with the logic of myth as it does with the logics of ecology or economics.

Slotkin posits that mythic engagement, rather than argumentative persuasion, is the foundation of group solidarity and the primary inducement to concerted human action: “Myth can be seen as an intellectual or artistic construct that bridges the gap between the world of the mind and the world of affairs, between dream and reality, between impulse and desire or action. It draws on the content of individual and collective memory, structures it, and develops from it imperatives for belief and action” (Regeneration 7). In Burkean terms, myth is both the source and the metaphoric expression of our rhetorical orientations. But, more importantly, myth provides a public forum for our orientations.

For Slotkin, myth not only unites conscious will with unconscious desire; it also makes our private aspirations publicly expressible. “Myth-making… is simultaneously a psychological and a social activity.” For Slotkin a myth must be public for it to be a myth at all; private “myths” would be more on the order of a “fantasy.” The myth is articulated by individual artists and has its effect on the mind of each individual participant, but its function is to reconcile and unite these individualities to a collective group identity (Regeneration 8). Myth is the glue that holds discursive groups together—it invokes symbols of consensus (Fatal 254). This suggests that a lack of consensus
between groups should be marked by adherence to divergent and contradictory myths, and the following chapters of this dissertation will illustrate this point.

Of course, individuals rarely recognize the myths by which they live as myths. While by definition metaphoric, the most powerful myths are those not recognized (or admitted) as metaphor by their adherents. Myths express humans’ deepest beliefs about the nature of the world and “the good” and are thus inevitably ethical. Slotkin explains how an individual extrapolates personal experience and adaptation, through myth, into universal moral application:

On the basis of limited, finite experience, he creates a hypothetical vision of a universal, infinite order, and imposes that hypothesis on his perception of the phenomena of nature and his own behavior. He tests his vision by acting in accordance with those principles of behavior that seem to be demanded by reality as he envisions it. Insofar as that behavior is consistent with the universal order, it will seem to prosper him and acquire the name of virtue. (Slotkin, Regeneration 7)

This ethical dimension of mythos is crucial to understanding why rhetorical communities, such as conservationists and preservationists, employed such intensely and passionately moral language in defending their own position and attacking their opponents. While a rhetorical critic might fruitfully construe belief as mythos, it should be remembered that people never devote themselves to defending myths, but for “truth” and “right” they will give their very lives. While attention to mythos allows us, with the Baumsins, to “celebrate the diversity of truth,” it must be remembered that neither John Muir nor Gifford Pinchot had any use for such epistemological diversity. This fact will be explored in detail in the following two chapters.
Roderick Hart stresses the ethical significance of *mythos* in his commentary on myths and fantasy themes in *Modern Rhetorical Criticism*. He, in fact, argues that human "culture" itself is embedded in language through the interactions of values, myths and fantasy themes. "Values," for Hart are closely aligned with what Burke terms "orientation." *Values* are "deep-seated beliefs about right and wrong that express a person's basic-life orientation." These values are shaped and articulated through myths and fantasy themes. *Myths*, as defined by Hart, are "master stories that serve as moral guides to proper action," and *fantasy themes* are "abbreviated myths whose story lines hint at an idealized (not necessarily ideal) set of conditions" (305). According to Hart, myths and/or fantasy themes are operative, though often only subtly so, in all rhetorical discourse. He flatly insists that "All rhetoric depends on myth" (318).

Hart distinguishes four interrelated types of myth, all of which are directly relevant to a discussion of rhetorical situation. Myths are cosmological (they explain how we arrived at the present situation), ethical (they instruct us in our choice of action), social (they "explain what makes a cultural grouping special, and thus foster community identity), and they are *eschatological* (they "tell people where they are going"). These types of myth, though discrete, most often work in combination to express a total worldview. Mythic orientation is crucial in the dynamics of rhetorical situation, for it conditions both the interpretations of the situation and the responses to it for rhetors and audiences. In this claim, Hart is in line with both Burke and Slotkin. Hart goes further, though, by providing for the rhetorical critic detailed commentary on the discursive nature of myth and a critical methodology for analyzing the mythic aspects of rhetoric.
Hart identifies six strategic functions of myth in rhetoric. I want to briefly introduce each of these functions here and try to position them in relation to the thought on *mythos* and situation discussed above. In the following chapters I test these functions against the rhetoric surrounding Hetch Hetchy's damming. Hart's six strategic functions of myth are:

1) "*Myths provide a heightened sense of authority. Speakers expect their audiences to take myths seriously.*"

Hart sees the invocation of myth as an immediate and effective way to bolster a speaker's *ethos*. A speaker, by aligning him or herself with a widely accepted myth, can tap into that myth's already operative persuasive power. By invoking myth, speakers are able to create a measure of identity between themselves and those in their audience who are already conditioned by this myth. Of course, there is a potentially negative effect here; the speakers could instantly alienate themselves from auditor's who reject this myth and see it as counter-productive to their own world-view.

2) "*Myths provide a heightened sense of continuity.* "Myth, in short, gives meaning to the present by making it seem continuous with the past."

This observation echoes the thoughts of Burke and Miller, who both emphasize the nature of situations as *subjectively* recurrent. Situations derive their nature, in large part, through their interpreters' placement of them within a continuous mythic pattern. As already asserted, multiple interpretations of the same situation are possible (perhaps even
inevitable); Hart suggests that our perceptions of situations are determined by our mythic interpretations of it. Rhetors can deploy myth strategically, not only to enhance their own ethos, but in order to manipulate audience’s perception of and response to the situation itself.

3) "Myths provide a heightened sense of coherence. Just as myth reaches across time, it reaches across ideas in order to fashion whole, consistent ideologies."

Myth is evocative rather than referential, abstract rather than concrete, suggestive rather than polemical. Myth derives its power in correlation to its abstraction—its distance from mere factuality. The unique and varied experiences of the individuals who constitute most rhetorical communities can coalesce into a mutual identity as a group with a "cause" only through explanatory myths that transform singular perspectives into a common perspective. Myths are effectively persuasive only insofar as they can encompass and give public articulation to a multiplicity of private orientations. In Burkean terms, myths fashion a group motive from individual motives. Hart’s fourth mythic function follows closely upon the third.

4) "Myths provide a heightened sense of community. The best myths are shared myths."

This function of myth seems to be simply the inevitable result of the third. Myths provide coherence, and from that coherence community identity is solidified. Some issues (e.g. abortion, capital punishment, and the wilderness debates considered here) are highly contentious (and emotionally charged) because distinct communities coalesce
around variant myths, myths which express values and orientations that seem incommensurate. One way of speculating upon the outcome of such divisive issues would be to consider which has the most powerful mythic appeal, the most power to sway individuals with its mythic narratives and imagery, which myth has the most future. One might also ask if there is any room for compromise between variant myths. Do such volatile issues and their divergent mythic orientations permit rapprochement?

5) “Myths provide a heightened sense of choice. Myths dramatize alternatives by dialectically featuring good and evil.” “In effective rhetoric... evil cannot become impotent.”

By invoking myth to validate a community’s shared ethics and beliefs, that community must, according to Hart, necessarily demonize its opposition’s world-view through the same myths. Examples of this mythic characteristic will be dishearteningly abundant in this dissertation, but I would like to challenge the inevitability of this function. It may be a case of wishful thinking, but can we imagine a rhetorical model that recognizes the power of myth without construing that power as necessarily agonistic? That this negative function exists is undeniable. But must it? Is there a possibility for the recognition and reconciliation of divergent mythoi in rhetoric? I return to this question in the conclusion to this dissertation.
6) "Because myths are abstract, they can be viewed by different persons at different times and still generate roughly the same understanding."

This, too, seems to be primarily an extension of the third function. Myths provide diachronic as well as synchronic coherence. This explains the persistence of myths (and the rhetoric informed by them) across generations. As this dissertation will illustrate, the arguments made by Preservationists and Conservationists today would be very familiar to John Muir and Gifford Pinchot a century ago because they are primarily supported by mythic assumptions widely held at the turn of the century. Although Hart emphasizes the abstract nature of myth, he does not adequately consider what I see to be one of the most important and potentially positive aspects of that abstraction. Because myths are conceptually elastic, they evolve and are amenable to multiple interpretations. This permits the possibility for a rhetoric of reconciliation rather than confrontation.

In addition to providing insight into the rhetorical function of myth, Hart also supplies the rhetorical critic with some suggestions for a critical methodology. He modifies Levi-Strauss’s guidelines for the critic of myth to better fulfill the aims of the rhetorical critic. Rather than detailing all of Hart’s recommendations, I would like here to simply paraphrase the suggestions that seem most pertinent to my project. Hart suggests that myths be considered synthetically rather than analytically. While a formalist dissection of myth might be appropriate for some studies, the rhetorical critic should focus on “the harmony of emotions, images, and ideas a given myth provides” (322). This attention to the synthetic power of myth should not, however, mask the fact that oppositional forces “always already” exist in any myth (322). As post-structuralists
would argue holds true for all narrative, Hart insists that myths contain the internal
oppositions ripe for their own deconstruction. This internal tension allows the rhetor to
exploit those elements of myth most appropriate to the world-view she wishes to
articulate through it and the situation to which she applies it. The "myth of the Garden,"
for instance, allows for both preservationists and conservationists to invoke it as a suasive
force in their clearly divergent arguments. The job of the rhetorical critic is to illustrate
how myths are strategically and incidentally invoked in discrete rhetorical situations.

Attention to myth in rhetoric, according to Hart, reveals a wealth of information
about both the rhetor's ethos and that of the audiences they attempt to engage. Myth (or,
more accurately a rhetor's expedient version of myth, or fantasy theme), discloses such
basic, though often only implicit, assumptions as "What are people like?" Are they
dependable, deceived, good, evil, selfish, selfless, etc. "What are the possibilities for
group action?" "Upon what can people most depend?" "What is humankind's
fundamental purpose on earth?" "What are the fundamental measures of right and
wrong?" "How can success best be measured?" "What sort of information is most
dependable?" and "Why do things happen as they do?" The power of myth to divulge
such crucial information makes attention to it indispensable for a critic attempting to
account for individual and community orientations within rhetorical situations.

Walter Fisher, in Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of
Reason, Value, and Action, describes humans as incorrigible storytellers, fabulists whose
incessant narratives give their lives the only meaning and purpose they have. In his
conceptualization of humans as *homo narrans*, Fisher provides some valuable insight into the workings of rhetorical *mythos*. Fisher argues that, at one point in the western rhetorical tradition, *mythos* was indistinguishable from *logos*, but the appeals were then made distinct and disassociated by pre-Socratic philosophers (5). He suggests that rhetorical critics must reclaim *mythos* as an important term in our conceptual vocabulary, for “human communication, in all of its forms, is imbued with *mythos*, ideas that cannot be verified or proved to be true in any absolute way” (19). Fisher holds that we “experience and comprehend life as a series of on-going narratives, as conflicts, characters, beginnings, middles and ends. The various modes of communication, all forms of symbolic action, then may be seen as stories, interpretations of things in sequences” (29).

Fisher suggests that we are not so much persuaded through a process of argumentative *deliberation* as we are moved by *identification* with powerful stories (67). Rhetorical communities rise and cohere through common identification with the stories that make the most sense to its individual members. Fisher posits that this common sense arises from “good reasons,” which are “values, or value-laden warrants, for believing or acting in certain ways (xi). According to Fisher, narratives, rather than conforming to a transcendent logic, develop an internal logic, but not just anything counts as logic. In order for a story to have narrative logic, it must have both *coherence* within the narrative and *fidelity* to the world outside the text (xi).

Fisher holds that this coherence and fidelity cannot be judged against universal standards but must be evaluated situationally, for “good reasons” vary from occasion to occasion.
occasion. Fisher rejects both Bitzerian objectivism and Vatzian subjectivism, opting instead for a constructivist paradigm of logic, insisting that good reasons “are ruled by matters of history, biography, culture, and character...” (5). Fisher’s notion of coherence is important for evaluating the internal strengths and weaknesses of a story, while his notion of fidelity is extremely helpful in thinking about rhetorical situations. For Fisher, narrative fidelity is constantly tested by audiences, and they make this test by judging “whether or not the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true and their lives” (5).

Thus, for Fisher, reasonableness and rationality remain instrumental in evaluating rhetorical competence, but determinations of reasonableness and rationality must be made situationally, “in relation to the circumstances in which discourse occurs” (124). Fisher insists that this situational perspective does not necessitate radical relativism. Both critics and audiences have the agency to choose among variant (and often competing) narratives, for “Obviously, some stories are better stories than others, more coherent, more true to the way people and the world are...”(68). Rhetors retain the agency to choose among diverse (though not unlimited) stories in making their appeals to audiences. Fisher argues that the most effective rhetors will be those with the most narratives (or myths) from which to choose and the discernment necessary to fit stories to a situation (or fit a situation into a story):

Any culture has a finite number of ways of developing ideas, and the person who knows most of these ways is the better equipped to discover what to say about any subject. Rhetorical situations narrow the number of options for creating relevant argumentation. There is a discovery, an
inventional process in the making of rhetoric, and a measure of rhetorical effectiveness is whether or not a rhetor knows how to discover his or her practical options. (38)

Fisher’s understanding of mythos and narrativity in rhetoric thus grants situation agency in that situations constrain the scope of appropriate responses and yet retain agency for rhetors and audiences in that they can choose among the most effective responses. “Viewing human communication narratively, stresses that people are full participants in the making of messages, whether they are agents (authors) or audiences (coauthors).”

In the following chapters, I look at the formation of two distinct rhetorical communities, both interested and invested in the future of American wilderness. This exploration eventuates in an account of how these two communities clashed over the future of a particular wilderness site. In the next chapter, I look at John Muir as both a representative of and major contributor to preservationist mythos. In the third chapter I look at Gifford Pinchot through a similar lens in relation to conservationist mythos. Though both accounts rely on a biographical structure, my intention is not to provide comprehensive accounts of their lives, but to explore how disparate mythic orientations were exemplified and expressed by these two men.

1 As I hope will become clear, I am not attempting to construct a neat binary, neither am I suggesting that identification with the Preservationist and Conservationist communities were (or are) the only possible responses to wilderness issues. I am deliberately focusing on communities that have evolved distinct and mutually antagonistic “world-views.”

2 Of course, a fully committed humanistic/scientific worldview, might hold that, given human ingenuity, there are no irremediable exigencies.
3 Many rhetoricians (and not a few psychologists) would, of course, argue that private, individual cognition and decision-making is itself largely discursive and, thus, rhetorical.

4 In some sense, Bitzer reduces rhetoric to crisis intervention exclusively; to me this seems much too prohibitive and limiting of rhetoric's full potential.

5 It should be noted that Bitzer does not take all agency away from humans because after the rhetoric is brought out, aimed, and fired by the situation, human actors will either act to remedy the exigence or will choose not to.

6 Such an assumption almost necessarily entails a corresponding assumption about what counts as valid rationality; all too often, of course, such assumptions are gender, class, and culturally biased.

7 On a related note to Burke's observation, I.A. Richards defined rhetoric as the study of human miscommunication and its remedies. See his Philosophy of Rhetoric.

8 My intention here is not to offer a comprehensive survey of the views of Bitzer, Vatz, or their many respondents. Bitzer's 1968 essay prompted numerous replies, largely from speech communications theorists, and my intent is not to do justice to this rich dialogue.

9 I feel compelled to point out that even though I draw so much from Miller's essay, the essay itself is concerned primarily with rhetorical genre, not rhetorical situation or mythos per se.

10 While this emphasis on the interpretative nature of situation might seem to align Miller more closely to the Vatzian model, she insists that our definitions and determinations of situations are constrained socially, not individually, as Vatz suggests.

11 I would modify this claim to say that we can (and always do) identify ourselves with cultural groups and rhetorical communities beyond and in addition to those into which we are, by fate, born. In fact, many of us consciously and deliberately reject (or escape) some of the cultural groups into which we are born, while other group identities persist. We can also adopt group identities long after our births. For instance I was not born into the cultural group "environmentalist" or "academic," yet my identity within those groups have a profound deterministic effect on my perceptions of situations.

12 As Will Durant has put it: "a fact is nothing except in relation to desire" (2).

13 Kuhn refers to this condition as the conflict of "incommensurate paradigms."

14 Of course, television and film producers, among others, would be added to this list for the twentieth century.

15 Hart discusses methodological approaches for the study of "myth" and "fantasy themes" separately. I collapse that distinction in my overview.
CHAPTER 2

JOHN MUIR AND THE EDENIC GARDEN

"This curious world we inhabit is more wonderful than convenient; more beautiful than it is useful; it is more to be admired and enjoyed than used."

Henry David Thoreau

In this chapter I explore the shared orientations, mythic assumptions, and favorite tropes of wilderness preservationists by focusing on John Muir, preservationist par excellence. My goals in this chapter are: 1) to describe Muir’s development of a mythos of wilderness that, while grounded in the rhetoric of Protestant Christianity, radically subverts some of the core theological assumptions of that faith; 2) to illustrate how Muir consistently and insistently troped wilderness as a Garden/Temple; and 3) to show how this mythic construction, while enabling an important ecocentric challenge to dominant anthropocentrism, also led to an implicit misanthropy which weakened the Preservationists’ rhetorical effectiveness in the Hetch Hetchy debate.

While Muir developed and articulated the preservationist perspective as did no other American writer of his time, my intent is not to reduce a rhetorical community to a
single personality. Tolstoy said that, "In historic events, the so-called great men are labels giving names to events, and like labels they have but the smallest connection with the thing itself" (259). Although I hold that Muir has more than a small connection with the events treated in this dissertation, my intent is not to offer Muir as embodiment, but as example, of the preservationist perspective. Although certainly the most famous preservationist of his day and highly influential in propagating that cause, Muir was himself just one representative member of a much larger community.¹ Suffice it for now to say that Muir's life and writing, while not incarnating preservationism, more than adequately illustrates its basic world-view.

A Dynamic Era

Muir and his contemporaries lived through what was arguably the most transformative era in the history of human technology. Although we in the late twentieth century think of ourselves as inhabiting a world of unprecedented and rapid technological innovation, Muir's generation witnessed far more. In April of 1838, the infant Muir entered a world without telegraphs, electric lights, automobiles, telephones, photography, radio, airplanes, phonographs, or motion pictures. By the time he died, in December 1914, all of these inventions were widely used, along with a host of life-changing innovations in medicine, industry, agriculture, and weaponry. It is important to note for my own argument that most of these transformations debuted in the last two decades of Muir's life—the years in which debates over the future of wilderness in this country exploded on the national scene.²
The transformations this generation experienced were not just technological; Americans of this era also lived through extraordinary demographic, political, and cultural change. The America of Muir's boyhood was, on the world stage, a backwater former English colony, lying almost entirely east of the Mississippi. By his death, the U.S. was a global military power spanning the continent from Atlantic to Pacific and poised to become the ascendant nation of the twentieth century. The era was marked, according to Eric Hofstadter, by "a rapid and turbulent transition from the conditions of an agrarian society to those of modern urban life" (7). The population nearly trebled between 1860 and 1910, and by 1900 one-third of Americans lived in cities; by 1920 half would (Jones 319). While the move from an agrarian to an urban way of life was eagerly embraced by, rather than imposed upon, most Americans, these dislocations prompted immense psycho-cultural effects that had direct bearing on contemporaneous understandings of wilderness; for, in a very real sense, most Americans of the early twentieth century were living in a entirely different world from the one into which they were born. I return to this sociological condition throughout this dissertation for it provides a crucial context for the rhetorical mythos of both preservationists and conservationists in the Hetch Hetchy debate.

A Dynamic Man

Like the world he inhabited, Muir went through dramatic personal transformations. Muir's early life readily fits Kenneth Burke's model of "orientation, disorientation, and reorientation" as set forth in Permanence and Change.
Muir's first "orientation" was spiritual (specifically fundamentalist Protestant), his "disorientation" was romantic and scientific in nature, and his "reorientation" involved a spiritualization and romanticization of science, or, put the other way, a scientizing and romanticizing of protestant spirituality. This reorientation involved the articulation of a unique mythical and ethical understanding of wilderness. Burke's model implies neither that individuals are at the mercy of their environments, nor that they are immune to their socio-cultural positions; rather, Burke's paradigm allows for the real and effective agency of individuals to adopt, resist, or modify the no less real and effective influence of their cultural orientation (linguistic, at root, according to Burke) into which they are born. 

Burke holds that divergent orientations "make for totally different pictures of reality, since they focus the attention upon different orders of relationship. We learn to single out certain relationships in accordance with the particular linguistic structure into which we are born" (51). Muir was born into a linguistic (and psychological) structure decidedly biblical and puritanical. His father, Daniel Muir, was a strict and dour Protestant sectarian, who literally beat the Bible into his children. By the time John was eleven (at which age he immigrated to the United States) he could recite, from memory, all of the New Testament without omitting a word, and he knew three quarters of the Old Testament by heart as well; he acknowledged that he achieved this feat through "sore flesh" (My Boyhood 31). According to one biographer, Daniel Muir's home was a "concentration camp" (Wolfe 70); its pogrom was the eradication of the worldly and the inculcation of the Word. Muir would flee this environment and set out to find the Word
in the World, but his writing was indelibly imbued with the language, imagery, and mythology of the Bible.

**Biblical Wilderness**

The Bible, through which Daniel Muir doggedly indoctrinated his son John, is consistent and adamant in its negative portrayal of "wild" nature, and it is important to foreground the Bible as Muir's first wilderness orientation. In the first chapter of *Genesis*, God orders humans to "subdue" the earth and have "dominion" over it. This hierarchical approach to creation runs throughout the Bible, and I will return to it (and the subsequent notion of "stewardship") when discussing the conservationist perspective, but I would like now to focus on the specific references to *wilderness* John Muir would have encountered in his memorization of the Bible.

*Wilderness* in the Old Testament becomes a trope for evil, for separation from God. For the pastoral Israelites, wilderness was, understandably, a threat—the abode of serpents, wolves, brigands, and, more significantly, thirst, hunger, and exposure. It is the land through which the Israelites, in their escape from Egypt, can pass only with the beneficent intervention of their god, Jehovah. Their hope is for deliverance to a "land of milk and honey" (*Exodus* 3:8)—in other words, a land transformed out of its wilderness state and into a state of safe agricultural production: "and I will rid evil beasts out of the land" (*Leviticus* 26:6).

The line between ecological wilderness and spiritual/psychological wilderness is often blurred in scripture; in fact, the first wilderness the Israelites enter, after their
exodus from Egypt, is, literally, the “Wilderness of Sin” (Exodus 16:1). And throughout the Old Testament, Jehovah and his prophets remind the children of Israel of how they were sustained in the wilderness only by the benign intercession of their god, for only “the voice of the Lord shaketh the wilderness” (Psalms 29:8). After the Israelites are delivered into the Promised Land, they are continually threatened with the reconquest of their fields and vineyards by wilderness (see especially the books of Isaiah and Joshua). For the Children of Israel, Jehovah is the only power strong enough to resist the ever-threatening encroachment of wilderness upon civilization.

Wilderness is a place of hardship and confusion, “where there is no way,” (Psalm 107:40), but Jehovah can not only sustain his children in the wilderness and deliver them from it; he can transform the wilderness into a place of order, plentitude, and ease. He promises his chosen that (contingent on their obedience to him) he will cause the wilderness to blossom abundantly (Isaiah 35:2), and that “Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain” (Isaiah 40:4). Jehovah’s ability to “correct” wilderness, to improve upon his own creation, is touted as evidence of his power and glory:

I will plant in the wilderness the cedar, the shittah tree, and the myrtle, and the oil tree: I will set in the desert the fir tree, and the pine, and the box tree together. 19 That they may see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this, and the Holy One of Israel hath created it. (Isaiah 41: 19-20)

For the Lord shall comfort Zion: he will make comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of Lord. (Isaiah 51:3)
Wilderness preservation was obviously far from the minds of an expanding tribal people shifting from a nomadic and pastoral to a settled and agrarian way of life.

Significantly, the threat of wilderness can rise from within civilization as well as from without. Jehovah, the jealous god, worries that his chosen might forsake him for the worship of nature and forbids the production of images, lest the people begin to worship beasts, fowls, the sun, the moon, or stars (Deuteronomy 4:17-19). Jehovah is especially sensitive about the blasphemously sacred "groves of Baal," and most spiritual revivals in the books of history and the prophets eventuate in the call for the wholesale axing of the offending trees, as well as the murder of their worshipers (2 Kings 18:4, et al.).

Wilderness shows up much less frequently in the cosmopolitan New Testament, but when it does it is most often the site of temptation, including the temptation of Christ himself (Matthew 4:1, et al.). Significantly, though, it is also a site for the resistance of temptation and for the testing of mind, body, and spirit, a place for ritual purification. Roderick Nash points out that in the Christian, as distinct from the Judaic, tradition, wilderness becomes a sanctuary for saints and prophets (Wilderness 17), a location from which the holy could bring the warnings of retribution and promise of redemption to the corrupt and unholy cities. This understanding of wilderness would be retained by Muir long after he had abandoned (and directly refuted) the Old Testament portrayal of wilderness as malignant, imperfect, and unholy.
Daniel Muir and the Protestant Transformation of Nature

Many critics have accused the Judeo-Christian world-view of being anti-ecological and hateful towards nature (White, Eherenfield, et al.). Although this view is not accepted by all (Gore, et al.), it is clear that wilderness in Judeo-Christian scripture is not to be “protected” or valued in itself; it is, in fact, to be abhorred and transformed into something better. Bible-based Christianity, with its disdain for the “worldly” has, according to many, found in scripture much support and encouragement for its hostility to wilderness. The spiritual elevation of the Word of God, according to Richard Slotkin, often leads to a diminution of the world; he says of early protestant settlers in North America: “The evil was of the world, of nature; the good was transcendent and supernatural. Hence it was quite appropriate to destroy the natural wilderness in the name of a higher good—and quite inappropriate for anyone to worship, as the Indians did, the world or the things of the world, such things being evil by nature. (Regeneration 51). By all accounts, this was the attitude of Daniel Muir12 when he moved his family from Scotland to a farm in the woods of Wisconsin. Daniel concurred with the opinion, prevalent among protestant settlers, that “Only slackers or sinners approached nature without ax or plow” (Nash, Wilderness 122). Max Oelschlager notes that “Christianity can be seen as culminating the rationalization of agriculture, and Daniel Muir personified the Christian outlook on the natural world” (183). The agricultural outlook demands a transformed wilderness—nature made productive for humans.

We get most of our portrait of Daniel second-hand, primarily through the reports of John and Daniel’s other children, but in one letter from Daniel to John, dated March
19, 1874, we see Daniel's views toward nature clearly expressed in his own words. Daniel has just read John's account of his surviving a blizzard on Mount Shasta and writes his son to admonish him for his recklessness: "If it had not been for God's boundless mercy you would have been cut off in the midst of your folly." Daniel cannot at all understand his son's desire to climb mountains for the sheer pleasure of climbing mountains and uses this occasion to talk about God's love turning the believer's "sight and eyes from the things that are seen and temporal to the things that are not seen and eternal, according to God's holy word." He warns John that his wilderness forays and studies of nature are a spiritual distraction, for "It is of no use to look through a glass darkly when we have the gospel and its fulfillment..." (Bade 20-1). In this declaration, we see the essential conflict between the Word and the World.

Daniel Muir, as would be expected, was adamantly opposed to any view that allowed for a harmony between nature and biblical or personal revelation (Bade 74). John flatly rejected this view. In an early letter to Mrs. Jean Carr, dated Jan. 1866, John writes: "It may be a bad symptom, but I will confess that I take more intense delight from reading the power and goodness of God from 'the things which are made' than from the Bible" (Bade 147). And in a letter to Emily Pelton, dated May 23, 1865, Muir complains that "those miserable hymns, such as "The world is all a fleeting show/ For man's delusion given,' do not at all correspond to my likings, and I am sure that they do not with yours" (Bade 135). This departure from his father's beliefs is an important element of Muir's disorientation—a corrective adjustment of the linguistic and cultural patterns...
into which he was born, a questioning of the language and myths instilled into him by his father.

Daniel was, undeniably, severe, and John seems to have rankled under his father’s severity at a fairly young age. When a child, John liked to ramble through the countryside outside his native Dunbar, and his father soon prohibited these “wilderness sojourns” as being wastes of time and opportunities for mischief (My Boyhood 50). John continued to sneak off every chance he could get. John’s early resistance to his father was encouraged, at least in part, by the mitigating influence of his mother. Relatively little is known about Anne Gilyre Muir, but we do know that she was much less dreary than her husband. According to John, she was fond of painting and poetry, and loved to sing Highland ballads around the home, though eventually Daniel damned those songs as pagan blasphemies and banned them from his house (Fox 28). As with many such “frivolities,” Anne demurred to her husband while in his presence, but would laugh and sing with the children when he was absent, according to the remembrances of John and his siblings. This had to have encouraged John in his rebellion from his father’s overbearing and grim approach to life.

From an early age, John saw the outdoors as an escape from and an antidote to his father’s zealous puritanism. In later life, he concedes the severity of his father’s influence, but then dismisses it as impotent against the power of the wild: “But those terrible fire lessons quickly faded away in the blithe wilderness air; for no fire can be hotter than the heavenly fire of faith and hope that burns in every healthy boy’s heart” (My Boyhood 77). And, in a revealing remembrance of his childhood, John says that “I
was so proud of my skill as a climber that when I first heard of hell from a servant girl who loved to tell its horrors and warn us that if we did anything wrong we would be cast into it, I always insisted that I could climb out of it” (*My Boyhood* 18).

Despite John’s minimizing of his father’s “fire lessons,” this early orientation left an indelible mark, throughout life, on his thinking and writing. Although he would reject his father’s angry God for liberal Christianity’s gentle God of love and would absolutely and resolutely reverse his father’s association of the natural with “the fallen,” he always retained an essentially spiritual, even biblical, view of life and the world. He also inherited from his father an evangelical fervor; although preaching a far different gospel, John, like Daniel, was impassioned by the call to spread the holy word. Moreover, he developed a personal prose style and vocabulary saturated with the language of the Bible. At the same time, he searched earnestly for an alternative to his father’s strict biblical fundamentalism.

**John Muir’s Heresy**

Many critics and biographers have minimized the absolute heresy of some of Muir’s ideas. Max Oelschlager claims that, “interestingly, and perhaps crucially, Muir never became an atheist, never explicitly rejected the Calvinistic theology of his youth; he simply outgrew the constrictions of conventional faith and developed a theology of the wilderness” (177). While I agree with Oelschlager that Muir never became an atheist, Muir’s disorientation from his father’s world-view involved an explicit rejection of Calvinistic theology. Oelschlager’s and other critics’ unwillingness to recognize this
rejection might be due to the fact that Muir’s rejection is a radical rhetorical subversion rather than an outright doctrinal denial of orthodox views. In Burkean terms, Muir reorients the rhetoric of his youth. According to Burke, reorientation involves a private manipulation of the linguistic textures of our earlier orientation: “When we do so, we invent new terms, or apply our old vocabulary in new ways, attempting to socialize our position by so manipulating the linguistic equipment of our group that our particular additions or alterations can be shown to fit into the old texture” (53). The common failure among critics to recognize the depth of Muir’s heresy is testimony to his successful rhetorical reorientation.

It is not my intent to attempt a full and detailed account of how (and through which influences) Muir’s disorientation came about—such an account would call for an extensive psychological biography. Rather than making an attempt at that here, I will note the most important influences in Muir’s world-view, as they appear in his own writing, and concentrate especially on Muir’s articulation of a heretical wilderness mythos. At this point, I want to focus not so much on why Muir rejected the world-view into which he was born, but on how he expressed this rejection. This will lead to an exploration of how one particular myth from his childhood, that of the Garden-Temple, was reworked by Muir as an adult, illustrating how he achieved reorientation with that myth.

Muir’s heretical reorientation is expressed clearly and forcefully in the observations he made on his walk in 1867-68 from northern Kentucky to southern Florida. These observations were initially made in a personal journal, but in 1915, that
journal was published as *A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf*. Along this walk Muir began, for the first time, to articulate in detail, and in writing, his rejection of his father's, and, in fact, the dominant Christian, world-view. The key notes of this rejection are that 1) wild nature has its own *intrinsic worth*, apart from (and regardless of) its usefulness to humans; and 2) humans are not superior to the rest of creation in any spiritual sense. While the first claim might be acceptable within certain Christian communities (e.g. St. Francis and his followers or twentieth century proponents, such as Al Gore, of Christian environmental stewardship), the second claim places Muir beyond the pale of orthodox Christian belief. These heretical beliefs encouraged Muir to develop an innovative ethical approach to nature, an approach based on a holistic, rather than analytic, recognition of nature and a view of himself as a participating consciousness in (or of) the wilderness, rather than a transcendent observer of it.

At the outset of his long walk, Muir makes some suppositions about non-human nature and our relation to it that are clearly opposed to accepted Christian doctrine, and yet he couches these suppositions within obviously theological language. He first observes "How little we know as yet of the life of plants—their hopes and fears, pains and enjoyments!" (*Walk* 19). The "as yet" reveals that, for Muir, such intimate knowledge of plants is possible, but, because of arrogant human assumptions about our "special creation," such knowledge has not been pursued. He goes on to note that "They tell us that plants are perishable, soulless creatures, that only man is immortal, etc.; but this, I think, is something that we know very nearly nothing about" (92). He goes so far as to allow for the sentience of inorganic matter: "But why may not even a mineral
arrangement of matter be endowed with a sensation of a kind that we in our blind exclusive perfection have no manner of communication with?" (140).

Although Muir is an uncompromising "leveler" among species (and even "lifeless" nature), his attempts to place humans in the same ethical category as non-human life do not involve reducing humans to biological material or mere ecological components, but in lifting the non-human to the higher religious potential held by humans in the traditional Great Chain of Being. This is an important element in the spiritualization of wilderness that Muir would make a central plank in his preservation efforts, a spiritualization that continues to mark arguments for wilderness preservation.

Muir sees himself on his walk as a religious pilgrim and his destination as a sort of promised land. When he reaches Florida on October 15, he writes in his journal, "Today, at last, I reached Florida, the so-called "Land of Flowers," that I had so long waited for, wondering if after all my longings and prayers would be in vain, and I should die without a glimpse of the flowery Canaan" (Walk 87). Clearly, he is predisposed to discovering some spiritual enlightenment there, and he is not disappointed. After reaching Florida, and there encountering his first alligator, Muir makes what remains one of his most notorious criticisms of anthropocentrism, and again he does it by retaining a spiritual orientation, while turning traditional theology on its head. He first notes the antipathy felt by most humans for alligators: "Many good people believe that alligators were created by the Devil, thus accounting for their all-consuming appetite and ugliness" (98). Of course, traditional, accepted Christian theology could not entirely concur with this, even if the attitudes it helped shape would; God created all creatures, great and
small, fierce and gentle. Muir knows this, and uses this inconsistency to his argumentative benefit, quickly inserting, “But doubtless these creatures are happy and fill the place assigned them by the great Creator of us all” (98). Though orthodox Christianity might scoff at the notion of “happy” alligators, it would have trouble disputing that the creatures are created by God and thus have a purpose.

Aesthetics, argues Muir, are relative: “Fierce and cruel they appear to us, but beautiful in the eyes of God” (98). Muir then, in a pattern of argumentative escalation typical of his discursive style, declares of alligators, “They, also, are his children, for He hears their cries, cares for them tenderly, and provides their daily bread” (98). On one level, this all might seem like quaint anthropomorphizing, a flagrant and shameless perpetration of the “pathetic fallacy.” On another, though, it can be seen as a clever subversion of orthodoxy by an opponent with intimate knowledge of his enemy. Muir exploits what he knows to be a troubling inconsistency, however elaborately rationalized, in traditional Christian theology: the Creator is perfect, but His creation somehow flawed.

Muir then lashes out at his fellow humans for not imitating the love of the Father, and in the invective makes one of the first explicit mentions of “rights” in American preservationism: “How narrow we selfish, conceited creatures are in our sympathies! how blind to the rights of all the rest of creation! With what dismal irreverence we speak of our fellow mortals!” (99). He then extends the application of his argument beyond alligators to include all “repulsive” creatures, insisting that “They dwell happily in these flowery wilds, are part of God’s family, unfallen, undepraved, and cared for with the
same species of tenderness and love as is bestowed on angels in heaven or saints on earth” (99). Again, Muir begins with an unassailably orthodox claim: the God of love, loves all his creatures, but he then extends this truism beyond accepted dogma, to insinuate that snakes are on the same ethical plane as angels—though he does, uncharacteristically, hedge a bit here by writing “the same species of love” when he could have written “the same love.” This might have been a concession to moderation, but such a motive is made doubtful by the outrageous conclusion to his meditation on alligators.

He notes that his own prior opinion of alligators was softened by his having seen them in their own habitat (“I have better thoughts of those alligators now that I have seen them at home”), and that our human fear of such animals is due to “ignorance” and “weakness”—frailties incommensurable with Muir’s wilderness ethics. He then concludes by directly saluting the crocodilians: “Honorable representatives of the great saurians of an older creation, may you long enjoy your lilies and rushes, and be blessed now and then with a mouthful of terror-stricken man by way of dainty!” (99).14

Many passages in A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf are devoted to questioning the supposed superiority of humans, and Muir frequently uses the sardonic appellation, “Lord Man,” in reference to his own species. He notes that “dangerous animals” have their analogues in the vegetable kingdom, and the existence of both argue against a world created solely for the uses of humans. “Vegetable cats of many species will rob him of his clothes and claw his flesh, while dwarf palmettos will saw his bones, and the bayonets will glide to his joints and marrow without the smallest consideration for Lord
Man" (Walk 133). One of the most important planks in Muir’s wilderness agenda (and of preservationism as a whole) involves the rejection of an instrumental valuation of nature. Christian tradition and its scripture suggest that the world is but a transitory stage, upon which God and humans enact a spiritual drama; plants, animals, and land itself are reduced to scenery, mere stage props. The non-human is spiritually insignificant and thus is solely utile. Muir strenuously objects: “The world, we are told, was made especially for man—a presumption not supported by all the facts” (136). Muir observes that “A numerous class of men are painfully astonished whenever they find anything, living or dead, in all God’s universe, which they cannot eat or render in some way what they call useful to themselves” (136).

Significantly, Muir attacks this “class of men” by calling into question their own spirituality; he mocks their comfortable knowledge of God: “They have precise dogmatic insight of the intentions of the Creator, and it is hardly possible to be guilty of irreverence in speaking of their God anymore than of heathen idols” (136). Bear in mind that although Muir uses the distancing phrase “a certain class of men,” he is really talking here about men like his own father. Muir continues by ridiculing the God “these people” create in their own image: “He is regarded as a civilized, law-abiding gentleman in favor either of a republican form of government or of a limited monarchy; believes in the literature and language of England; is a warm supporter of the constitution and Sunday schools and missionary societies; and is as purely a manufactured article as any puppet of a half-penny theater” (136-137). Muir argues that with such mistaken views of the creator, a misguided understanding of the creation is inevitable.
Muir then goes on to lampoon this worldview (in a style evocative of Twain) by cataloguing a variety of non-human life and minerals and reducing them to their most basic instrumentality. Whales, for instance, “are storehouses of oil for us to help out the stars in lighting our dark ways until the discovery of the Pennsylvania oil wells.” Hemp “is a case of evident destination for ships’ rigging, wrapping packages, and hanging the wicked” (137). “Iron was made for hammers and plows, and lead for bullets; all intended for us” (138). Quickly, Muir returns to his speculations on dangerous and pestilent creatures and wonders how they could fit into such an instrumental world-view: “But if we should ask these profound expositors of God’s intentions, How about those man-eating animals—lions, tigers, alligators—which smack their lips over raw man? Or about those myriads of noxious insects that destroy labor and drink his blood?” (138).

Muir offers an answer he knows will be unacceptable: “Doubtless man was intended for food and drink for all these?” (138).

Of course, Muir has his opponents (obviously straw-men) reject this conclusion out of hand, but it is very important here to notice where he locates the source of their counter-arguments: “Oh, no! Not at all! These are unresolvable difficulties connected with Eden’s apple and the Devil. Why does water drown its lord? Why do so many minerals poison him? Why are so many plants and fishes deadly enemies? Why is the lord of creation subjected to the same laws of life as his subjects? Oh, all these things are satanic, or in some way connected with the first garden” (138). Muir is alluding here to an explanatory myth, a myth that he sees as inadequate and untenable, a myth that he will eventually co-opt and try to reform.
In place of an instrumental valuation of nature, Muir posits the intrinsic worth of non-human nature and bases that worth on 1) an extension of ethical consideration—the right of plants and animals to pursue their own happiness, and 2) the holistic awareness of a perfectly complete cosmos, where every niche is filled and filled perfectly. Muir never wavers in his sympathy for the “rights” of nature and even extends a form of ethical self-determination to it: “Now, it never seems to occur to these far seeing teachers that Nature’s object in making animals and plants might possibly be first of all the happiness of each one of them, not the creation of all for the happiness of one” (139).

In making his argument for the holistic perfection of creation, Muir again uses the strategy of taking an acceptable Christian belief: “And what creature of all that the Lord has taken the pains to make is not essential to the completeness of that unit—the cosmos?” (139), and then extending that uncontroversial claim to a most controversial conclusion: “Why should man value himself as more than a small part of the one great unit of creation?” (139). While orthodox Christianity has to admit the wisdom and necessity of all creation, it does not, with Muir, see in that the proof that humans are of the same value as the rest of creation. Again, Muir knows the orthodox position well enough to exploit it in his own cause. Rather than rejecting the Christian perspective he subverts it to reach his radical conclusions: “The universe would be incomplete without man; but it would also be incomplete without the smallest transmicroscopic creature that dwells beyond our conceitful eyes and knowledge” (139).

In direct contradiction to mainstream Christian creationism of the time, a doctrine under serious assault from Darwinism, Muir insists that human and non-human earthlings
were made in common, not in distinct creative acts: "From the dust of the earth, from the common elementary fund, the creator has made Homo sapiens. From the same material he has made every other creature, however noxious and insignificant to us. They are earth-born companions and our fellow mortals" (139). Muir was both attracted to and repelled by Darwinism, but his phrasing here: "the common elementary fund" is a direct endorsement of that part of Darwinism he found engaging, the idea of common ancestry and lineage among all life.¹⁵

Muir holds that our very real "kinship" with the life around us allows, in fact necessitates, a recognition of the inherent value of all creation, and he is very well aware of his apostasy in this regard. He blasting "The fearfully good, the orthodox, of this laborious patchwork of modern civilization," for they "cry 'Heresy' on every one whose sympathies reach a single hair's breadth beyond the boundary epidermis of our own species. As if to make sure that his position will be recognized as heresy, Muir goes so far as to elevate the non-human to the same eschatological category as humans; he extends, in fact, the promise of "eternal life" to plants and animals: "Not content with taking all of earth, they [the orthodox] also claim the celestial country, as the only ones who possess the kind of souls for which that imponderable empire was planned" (140).

To make his doctrinal divergence perfectly clear, as if it were not already, he directly refutes the idea of the world being a mere stage in the spiritual progress (or regress) of humans, in a passage that could only be anathema to Christian doctrine: "This star, our own good earth, made many a successful journey around the heavens ere man was made, and whole kingdoms of creatures enjoyed existence and returned to dust
ere man appeared to claim them. After human beings have also played their part in Creation’s plan, they too may disappear without any general burning or extraordinary commotion whatever” (140). To arrive at such a heretical conclusion, Muir had to re-envision the mythic basis of Christianity, particularly that of “the Fall.” Later in this chapter, I look at Muir’s modification of the Garden myth which, of course, is thoroughly imbricated with the Fall, but some initial observations should be made here in order to trace the intensity of Muir’s disorientation from his father’s religion.

Muir notes orthodox Christianity’s view of the entire creation as fallen and depraved, requiring “the cleansing chemistry of universal planetary combustion” (140), a purification which ends, however, in utter destruction of material nature, not its redemption. Muir adamantly objects to this view of nature as fallen, but he retains aspects, however modified, of the Christian “fall” in his philosophy. The modification lies in his view of humans as depraved, but depraved in direct correlation to their distance from unfallen, innocent, nature. This is crucial to understanding Muir’s wilderness mythos and his rhetorical use of the Garden. Redemption, for Muir, involves not the purification of spiritual gold from earthly dross, but the “renaturalization” of denaturalized humans: “But more than aught else mankind requires burning, as being in great part wicked, and if that transmundane furnace can be so applied and regulated as to smelt and purify us into conformity with the rest of the terrestrial creation, then the tophetization16 of the erratic genus Homo were a consummation devoutly to be prayed for”17 (140-141). Muir’s wilderness ethics rest on his unorthodox notion of humans as fallen and nature as sacred. Muir concludes this
heresy in A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf with a segue reminiscent of his childhood escapes from his father's "fire-sermons": "But glad to leave these ecclesiastical fires and blunders, I joyfully return to the immortal truth and the immortal beauty of Nature" (141). Increasingly throughout his life, Muir would resist such direct confrontations with orthodoxy, instead finding less confrontational, though still often heretical, sermons in the "immortal truth and immortal beauty of nature."

In A Thousand Mile Walk... Muir speculates on the challenges and rewards of hearing such sermons by using the metaphor of nature as palimpsest. He holds that nature's lessons are often confusing because they are so textually rich: "When a page is written over but once it may easily be read; but if it be written over and over with characters of every size and style, it soon becomes unreadable, although not a single confused meaningless mark or thought may occur among all the written characters to mar its perfection" (164). The language of nature is, in Muir's metaphor, intertextual, even hypertextual: "the inexhaustible pages of nature... are written over and over uncountable times, written in characters of every size and color, sentences composed of sentences, every part of a character a sentence" (164). This richness is due to the interconnectedness of unfallen creation: "There is not a fragment in all nature, for every relative fragment of one thing is a full harmonious unit in itself" (164). Humans alone, according to Muir, are capable of being disconnected and thus fragmented. This belief had a profound influence on the wilderness ethics Muir would go on to develop in the Sierra Nevadas.
Muir’s Sierra Ecstasy

From Florida, Muir sailed (indirectly) to California, where in 1868, at the age of 30, he first entered the Sierra Nevadas. Forty-three years later, in 1911, Muir reworked his 1868 journal entries as one volume in his multi-volume autobiography. In that book, *My First Summer in the Sierras*, a 73-year-old Muir uses spiritually charged language to recall his first entrance into the mountains. He remembers coming to the Sierras as a spiritual seeker and there finding God. This sanctification of wilderness as the abode of God, which for Muir would later become the god “Nature,” became the central plank of the wilderness preservation movement. This construction of wilderness as sacred land would eventually provide an effective impetus and convincing rationale for the protection of wild lands, but such a construction of wilderness has not been without its costs; I will later look at how this sacralization of wilderness weakened preservationists arguments in the Hetch Hetchy debate. I would now like to look at some of Muir’s perceptions and representations of wilderness in *My First Summer*. . ., along with a few excerpts from letters that he wrote during his first years in the Sierras and focus on the ways in which the spiritual wilderness ethic he articulates there, and would reiterate throughout his life, was weakened by elitism, racism and misanthropy.

Muir’s Sierra ecstasy, his vision of the Range of Light, was preceded by an occasion of blindness. In March of 1867, a little more than a year before he would enter the Sierras, and just before his walk to Florida, Muir was temporarily blinded in an industrial accident. Muir had achieved early renown as an inventor and mechanical genius and in 1867 was working in a factory in Indianapolis when a sharp file slipped in
his hand and punctured the cornea of his right eye. He immediately went blind in that eye and soon experienced sympathetic blindness in his left eye. Partial vision to the left eye returned in a few days, but it took months to recover his sight in the right. Muir, not surprisingly given his religious background, interpreted the accident as a sign from God, and he later wrote from Yosemite to a friend about its spiritual import. In language obviously influenced by the Apostle Paul’s own experience with blindness, Muir declares: “but though in that terrible darkness I died to light, I lived again, and God who is Light has led me tenderly from light to light to the shoreless ocean of rayless beamless Spirit Light that bathes these holy mountains” (Bade 374). Muir would repeatedly trope his Sierra experience as though he once was blind but now could see.

Muir’s record of his first moments in the mountains reveals a heightened sensitivity and eager receptiveness for spiritual renewal. He writes: “We are now in the mountains and they are in us, kindling enthusiasm, making every nerve quiver, filling every pore and cell of us. Our flesh-and-bone tabernacle seems transparent as glass to the beauty about us” (16). Muir sees the mountains as overflowing with spiritual enlightenment, truth and light just waiting to be revealed to the humble supplicant. He says, “everything is perfectly clean and pure and full of divine lessons” (157), and “All the wilderness seems to be full of tricks and plans to drive and draw us up into God’s light” (247).

Throughout his life Muir developed a pantheistic theology in which God was ubiquitously immanent in all creation, but God was particularly present for Muir on high mountain peaks and especially those of his beloved Sierras. Notice the religious yearning
and humble supplication in his voice as he catches a glimpse of the peaks which he has not yet been allowed to climb: “Through a meadow opening in the pine woods I see snowy peaks about the headwaters of the Merced above Yosemite. How consuming strong the invitation they extend! Shall I be allowed to go to them? Night and day I’ll pray that I may, but it seems too good to be true. Some one worthy will, able for the Godful work, yet as far as I can I must drift about these love-monument mountains, glad to be a servant of servants in so holy a wilderness” (16).

Muir is constantly searching for the presence of God in the Sierras, and, not surprisingly, he rhetorically constructs the mountains as consecrated temples. He writes of one particular grove, “it seemed the most romantic spot I had yet found--the one big stone with its mossy level top and smooth sides standing square and firm and solitary, like an altar…. The place seemed holy, where one might hope to see God” (49). In fact, Muir saw the wilderness as not only a potential site for the worship of God, but as a site far superior to mere human-made houses of worship. He observes, “No wonder the hills and groves were God’s first temples, and the more they are cut down and hewn into cathedrals and churches, the farther off and dimmer seems the Lord himself” (146).

My First Summer is the personal memoir of a successful spiritual quest, and Muir and his followers would remember that summer as an almost divine moment in which the Creator revealed His will to His apostle. Muir, writes, “[T]his June seems the greatest of all the months of my life, the most truly, divinely free, boundless like eternity, immortal. Everything in it seems equally divine—one smooth, pure, wild glow of Heaven’s love. Never to be blotted or blurred by anything past or to come” (68). And the very last words
of the book confirm the successful pilgrimage to and across the high peaks: “Here ends
my forever memorable first High Sierra excursion. I have crossed the Range of Light,
surely the brightest and best of all the Lord has built, and rejoicing in its glory, I gladly,
gratefully, hopefully pray I may see it again” (264).

From that first season in the mountains until the end of his life, Muir would see
temples where other saw mountains. This vision caused him to be impatient and, at
times, absolutely intolerant of anyone who approached the blessed wilderness with
anything less than awe. As one reader has pointed out, “Muir’s adjectives for the
landscape, used over and over again, include: ‘ethereal,’ ‘celestial,’ ‘heavenly,’
‘bodiless,’ ‘beatific,’ ‘luminous,’ ‘transfigured,’ ‘blazoned,’ and ‘radiating’” (Miller
145). Going to the mountains was for Muir a pilgrimage: “‘The Spirit’ has again led me
into the wilderness, in opposition to all counter attractions, and I am once more in the
glory of Yosemite” (Bade 242). Muir did not reject God for the things of the world, but
found God in every natural thing: “How wholly infused with God is this one big word of
love we call the world!” (Steep Trails 25) and “the whole landscape glows with
consciousness, like the face of a god” (Our National Parks 90). Muir reversed the
typical early American response to nature by finding God in the places most removed
from the cities and the lives of his fellow humans: “For they [mountain passes] lead
through regions that lie far above the ordinary haunts of the devil, and of the pestilence
that walks in the darkness” (Mountains I: 91). At times his language reaches a Blakean
intensity: “I feel strong to leap Yosemite walls in a bound... I will fuse in spirit skies. I
will touch naked God” (Wolfe 161).
Muir would return to the Sierras repeatedly throughout his life, and he would also return to the image of himself as a religious pilgrim—and later, in the guise of John O’ the Mountains—a wilderness preacher and prophet: “Heaven knows that John the Baptist was not more eager to get all his fellow sinners into the Jordan than I to baptize all of mine in the beauty of God’s mountains” (Wolfe 155). In a maniacally exuberant letter to Jean Carr, written in 1870 (a letter actually written in Sequoia sap) he exclaims,

But I’m in the woods, woods, woods, and they are in me-ee-ee. The King tree and I have sworn eternal love—sworn it without swearing, and I’ve taken the sacrament with Douglas squirrel, drunk Sequoia wine, sequoia blood, and with its rosy purple drops I am writing this woody gospel letter... I wish I were so drunk and Sequoical that I could preach the green brown woods to this juiceless world, descending from this divine wilderness like a John the Baptist, eating Douglas squirrels and wild honey or wild anything, crying, Repent, for the Kingdom of the Sequoia is at hand! (Bade 271).

This excitement and passion for wilderness would energize a life and career that still provides motivation for successful wilderness preservation in this country, and my intent is not to belittle or question the considerable contributions John Muir made to the environmental movement. I started studying Muir five years ago because I was intrigued by his alternative, ecocentric worldview, and I am still. My study, though, has made me a sometimes grumbling admirer. I have been confronted by some troubling aspects of Muir’s wilderness ethics (an ethics which remains greatly influential) that I believe need to be addressed.

Many of those weaknesses lie in his construction of wilderness as sacred land, and my objections can be loosely categorized into two types: First, wilderness as sacred
land implies wilderness as separate land—othered, islanded, set aside, guarded. This leads to an environmental ethic that splits ecological values between ultra-protective stances toward pristine, Edenic wilderness—“out there” and our actual behavior in the “already fallen” communities we inhabit on a daily basis. Here, I would like to consider a second consequence: by troping wilderness as a Garden-Temple, Muir suggests that only the holy and pure are considered worthy of worshipping there, and this conceit leads to an elitist assumption that most humans lack the grace truly to experience wilderness spiritually. In correspondence between Muir and Jean Carr, they speak of “the littleness of the number who are called to the pure and deep communion of the beautiful, all-loving nature.” This belief in a select “calling” led Muir to some very overt expressions of misanthropy. In an 1870 letter to Emily Pelton he declares, “As for the rough vertical animals called men, who occur, in and on these mountains like sticks of condensed filth, I am not in contact with them; I do not live with them. I live alone, or, rather, with the rocks and flowers and snows and blessed storms; I live in blessed mountain light, and love nothing less pure” (Bade 325). I would now like to take a closer look at Muir’s depiction of some of these “sticks of condensed filth” in order to illustrate how Muir’s preservationist ethic led to a misanthropy that would harmfully limit the preservationist community’s rhetorical choices in the Hetch Hetchy debate.

Laborers in the Wild

Chief among these “sticks” were the shepherds who in the summer grazed their flocks on the high mountain meadows. Muir speaks of them as insensitive brutes who
lack the spiritual and aesthetic sensitivities needed to appreciate the holy Garden-Temples they desecrate with their sheep. He observes, "It would seem impossible that any one, however incrusted with care, could escape the Godful influence of these sacred fern forests. Yet this very day I saw a shepherd pass through one of the finest of them without betraying more feeling than his sheep. 'What do you think of these grand ferns?' I asked. 'Oh, they're only damned big brakes,' he replied" (41). Comparing the shepherd to his sheep is significant here, for although Muir had a natural affinity with most animals, wild or domestic, he believed that although animals could gain heaven as well as humans, the lowest circle of hell must be reserved for domestic sheep.

One of the most troubling aspects of Muir's condemnation of shepherds is that he himself has entered the Sierras in 1868 as part of a shepherding crew. He realizes and damns the destruction caused by the sheep, whom he invariably refers to as "hoofed locust," but he chooses to participate in this industry so that he will someday have the means to have a "pure" wilderness experience. He writes, "The harm they [the sheep] do goes to the heart, but glorious hope lifts above all the dust and din and bids me look forward to a good time coming, when money enough will be earned to enable me to go walking where I like in pure wildness" (195). Sheep grazing is undeniably destructive to ecologically fragile alpine meadows, but the most disconcerting and seemingly hypocritical aspect of Muir's association with the activity is that he is willing to get his hands dirty so that he can later find redemption in the purity of the wild, while career shepherds, those who do it for their subsistence, are uniformly vilified by Muir. I reproduce a lengthy passage here to illustrate. Muir is talking about his companion
shepherd, Billy, whom he describes elsewhere as being so unwashed that his encrusted clothes have geological significance:

I have been trying to get him to walk to the brink of Yosemite for a view, offering to watch the sheep for a day, while he should enjoy what tourists come from all over the world to see. But though within a mile of the famous valley, he will not go to it even out of mere curiosity. ‘What,’ says he, ‘is Yosemite but a canon—a lot of rocks—a hole in the ground—a place dangerous about falling into—a damned good place to keep away from.’ ‘But think of the waterfalls, Billy—just think of that big stream we crossed the other day, falling half a mile through the air—think of that, and the sound it makes. You can hear it now like the roar of the sea.’ Thus I pressed Yosemite upon him like a missionary offering the gospel, but he would have none of it. ‘I should be afraid to look over so high a wall,’ he said. ‘It would make my head swim. There is nothing worth seeing anywhere, only rocks, and I see plenty of them here. Tourists that spend their money to see rocks and falls are fools, that’s all. You can’t humbug me. I’ve been in this country too long for that.’ (147)

This passage is very similar to another, in A Thousand Mile Walk. . ., where Muir encounters a Kentucky farmer: “He told me that he had never been to Mammoth Cave— that it was not worth going ten miles to see, as it was nothing but a hole in the ground, and I found that his was no rare case. He was one of the useful, practical men—too wise to waste precious time with weeds, caves, fossils, or anything else that he could not eat” (12-11). “Such souls,” Muir concludes, “are asleep, or smothered and befogged beneath mean pleasures and cares” (My First Summer . . . 147). Like some sort of wilderness Calvin, Muir suggests that only the select are granted the grace to enter the holy wilderness, and some are predestined to eternal blindness.

Despite his exasperation with Billy, Muir seems to have real fondness for him and, at times, even seems sympathetic to shepherds as a class. Muir seems to recognize
the economic roots of the shepherds’ “degradation.” He knows that as an exploited laborer, the shepherd is paid a (barely) subsistence wage, lives for weeks without human contact, and seldom or never achieves ownership of his own flock. Muir observes,

Coming into his hovel-cabin at night, stupidly weary, he has nothing to level and balance his life with the universe.... Of course his health suffers, reacting on his mind: and seeing nobody for weeks or months, he finally becomes semi-insane or wholly so. Of all Nature’s voices baa is about all he hears. Even the howls and ki-yis might be blessings if well heard, but he hears them only through a blur of mutton and wool, and they do him no good. (23-24).

Later in the book, Muir concludes that “Aside from mere money profit one would rather herd wolves than sheep” (256).

Muir’s critique is directed partly towards the brutal and abject lifestyle of the shepherd (which he experiences, temporarily, at first hand), partly towards the very real ecological damage inflicted by the voracious flocks, but, more significantly, he is troubled by the simple presence of economic activity on sacred land--there are money-changers in the temple. Upon unexpectedly encountering a man in the remote Sierras, Muir notes: “Suddenly the spell was broken by dull bumping, thudding sounds, and a man and a horse came in sight at the farther end of the meadow, where they seemed sadly out of place. A good big bear, or mastodon, or megatherium would have been more in keeping with the old mammoth forest” (Our National Parks 328). This man, unlike Muir, was not in the mountains for worship; he was a shingle maker looking for raw materials; thus he was, for Muir, clearly out of place.
Muir constantly refers to how much he feels at home in the mountains: “for going to the mountains is like going home. We always find that the strangest objects in these mountain wilds are in some degree familiar, and we look upon them with a vague sense of having seen them before” (Mountains I: 70). But he consistently sees other humans there, especially those making a living, as intruders. This opposition to “work” in wilderness is central to the preservationist outlook. While logging, mining, and grazing are clearly incompatible with the preservation of wild nature, contemporary environmentalists too often, like Muir, direct their ire towards the loggers and miners who are just trying to keep food on the table.20 This duality between work and wilderness too often leads to divisiveness, stalemate, and a perception of preservationists as misanthropic and elitist.

Natives in the Wild

Even more troubling than Muir’s dislike for shepherds is his inability to see the native tribal inhabitants of the Sierras as other than interlopers in his pure wilderness. In one passage from My First Summer, “An old Indian woman” visits the sheep camp. Muir describes her:

Her dress was calico rags, far from clean. In every way she seemed sadly unlike Nature’s neat well-dressed animals, though living like them on the bounty of the wilderness. Strange that mankind alone is dirty. Had she been clad in fur, or cloth woven of grass or shreedy bark... she might then have seemed a rightful part of the wilderness; like a good wolf at least, or bear. But from no point of view that I have found are such debased fellow beings a whit more natural than the glaring tailored tourists we saw that frightened the birds and squirrels. (59)
Muir goes to great lengths to place tribal peoples (specifically the Monos and remnants of the Awahneechee) outside the natural context of wilderness—for Muir they are evidence of humans’ fallen nature and have no rightful place in his Edenic mountains.

With an idiosyncrasy reminiscent of Thoreau, Muir disdains human, bodily uncleanliness while proclaiming the purity of the non-human world. He says of the natives, “What a strangely dirty and irregular life these dark-eyed, dark-haired, half-happy savages lead in this clean wilderness” (206). Elsewhere he says, “most Indians I have seen are not a whit more natural in their lives than we civilized whites. Perhaps if I knew them better I should like them better. The worst thing about them is their uncleanliness. Nothing truly wild is unclean” (226). Muir was too astute and experienced a naturalist to believe this literally; he is simply and perniciously conflating physical filth with spiritual uncleanliness. This association of filth with the human, and the designation of Indians as being particularly filthy humans, allows Muir to mark them as unclean trespassers in the temple—they have no place on sacred land, not because of their “naturalness” but because of their humanness. This is a blatant example of the dangers inherent in a strict binary between human and natural.

In a journal entry, dating from Muir’s first Yosemite summer, Muir writes, “Ruskin says that the idea of foulness is essentially connected with what he calls dead unorganized matter. How cordially I disbelieve him to-night, and were he to dwell among the powers of these mountains he would forget all dictionary differences between the clean and the unclean, and he would lose all memory and meaning of the diabolical
sin-begotten term foulness” (Bade 252). And yet, impurity becomes an important trope for Muir in his rationalizations as to why the Indian has no proper place on his sacred land.

He constructs shepherds in a similar fashion; they too are uncouth and dirty, and thus the wilderness has no place for them. Muir says of Billy: “Our shepherd is a queer character and hard to place in this wilderness” (129). Muir’s similar treatment of native peoples is more troubling, though, because they and their ancestors lived on the land for centuries before the native-born Scot arrived. Almost all wilderness areas in the United States today became so only after their native human inhabitants had been forcibly, often violently, removed. This indeed was the fate of the Awahneecees of the Yosemite Valley who had been violently removed from the valley by a military expedition in the service of mining interests just fifteen years before Muir’s first summer there. In Muir’s case, his misanthropic tendencies all too easily become an endorsement of a specific racist agenda—the forced removal of native inhabitants.

Muir’s low opinion of the Awahneechee and Mono people, however, did not spring from a personal racist outlook. Muir traveled extensively along the northern Pacific coast and visited various tribal peoples there. His written accounts of encounters with these natives, though not completely free of some of the racist assumptions of his time (like many of his generation, Muir was prone to eugenic and phrenological ranking of human types), were sympathetic, and for the most part, respectful: “One touch of nature makes all the world kin, and here were many touches among the wild Chukchis” (Cruise 36). Elsewhere he says of the Chukchis, “But there was a response in their eyes
that made you feel that they are your very brothers” (*Cruise 77*). Unlike the Yosemite tribes, Muir can embrace these people because they are far distant from his holy of holies. On an Alaskan journey he records “We spent the night under his roof, the first we had ever spent with Indians, and I never felt more at home” (*Travels 160*). This sympathy for the Indians Muir encounters outside of Yosemite leads some biographers to oversimplify Muir’s complex responses to native peoples. Linnie Marsh Wolfe writes, “[Muir] with his own deep-seated paganism, felt these children of the wilderness came nearer the truth of an immanent living Principle in all matter, than did the tutored, civilized exponents of Christianity” (*Wolfe 209*).

This liberal estimation of Muir is true, to a point, but it must be remembered that Muir seems to feel no such appreciation for the Monos or Awahneechees which leads him to some startling inconsistencies. On the Canadian coast, Muir witnesses the pillaging of a Indian graveyard. He disapproves of the destruction and supports the offended native, Kadachan, who “looked very seriously into the face of the reverend doctor and pushed home the pertinent question ‘How would you like to have an Indian go to a graveyard and break down and carry away a monument belonging to your family?’” (*Travels 93*). This is the same Muir who approved of the forcible expulsion of the Awahneechee from Yosemite valley, where the ashes and bones of their ancestors rest.

Whereas the Mono and the Awahneechee seem intruders in the Yosemite landscape, notice how Muir seamlessly inserts this Pacific coast tribe into his landscape portrait:
The warm air throbs and makes itself felt as a life-giving, energizing ocean, embracing all the landscape, quickening the imagination, and bringing to mind the life and motion about us—the tides, the rivers, the flood of light streaming through the satiny sky; the marvelous abundance of fishes feeding in the lower ocean; the misty flocks of insects in the air; wild sheep and goats on a thousand grassy ridges, beaver and mink far back on many a rushing stream; Indians floating and basking along the shores; leaves and crystals drinking the sunbeams; and glaciers on the mountains, making basins and valleys for new rivers and lakes and fertile beds of soil (Travels 47).

Compare this with Muir’s encounter with a band of Monos near a Sierra pass:

Just then I was startled by a lot of queer, hairy, muffled creatures coming shuffling, shambling, wallowing towards me as if they had no bones in their bodies. Had I discovered them when they were a good way off I should have tried to avoid them.... How glad I was to get away from the gray, grim crowd and see them vanish down the trail! Yet it seems sad to feel such desperate repulsion from one’s fellow beings, however degraded. (First Summer 218-220)

And in a description elsewhere of this same encounter Muir observes, “Somehow they seemed to have no right place in the landscape, and I was glad to see them fading out of sight down the pass” (Mountains I: 108). And, indeed, fading out of sight altogether.

In The Yosemite, Muir explains the forced removal of the natives from Yosemite by falling back on gross stereotypes: “In the wild gold years of 1849 and ’50, the Indian tribes along the western Sierra foothills became alarmed at the sudden invasion of their acorn orchards and game fields by miners, and soon began to make war upon them, in their usual murdering, plundering style” (254). He then explains how a Major Savage (no kidding) was sent in to root them out. Muir reports their chief, Tenaya, as proclaiming “Let us remain in the mountains where we were born, where the ashes of our fathers
have been given to the wind" (255-256). And, yet, Muir’s sympathies lie entirely with
Major Savage and his men, and he refers to the Indians defending their homes as
“murderers” (262). Later in his life, Muir would recall this tribal people with some
nostalgia, but no real regret for their disappearance: “But the Indians are passing away
here as everywhere, and their red camps of the mountains are fewer and fewer every
year” (Our National Parks 211).

Muir could not abide natives in his wilderness, not because they were “lesser”
humans, but because they were all too human. Like shepherds, Indians represented
human culture; Muir, like many preservationists since, constructs a strict binary between
the human and the natural. A century later, Donna Haraway observes, “Efforts to
preserve ‘nature’ in parks remain fatally troubled by the ineradicable mark of the
founding expulsion of those who used to live there, not as innocents in a garden, but as
people for whom the categories of nature and culture were not the salient ones”
(“Promise” 296).

Sight-Seers in the Wild

In 1868, with Indians disappearing in and around Yosemite, the valley had
already become a hotspot for tourists, and Muir aims some of his deadliest invective at
them. As with his critiques of shepherds, Muir’s disdain is complicated somewhat by the
fact that he arrived in Yosemite as a tourist himself. While in Florida, someone had
given him an illustrated folder about the Yosemite Valley and he decided to see it for
himself (Wolfe 105). For Muir, though, a tourist was not just any visitor to the

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mountains (though most would qualify), but a creature with certain recognizable characteristics: “They go in large parties with mules and horses; they make a great noise; they are dressed in outlandish, unnatural colors; every animal shuns them. Even the frightened pines would run away if they could” (Our National Parks 232). These are distinct from “nature-lovers” (not yet a pejorative term in Muir’s day), who are “devout, silent, open-eyed, looking and listening with love…” (Our National Parks 232).

The salvos Muir hurls at tourists come from the same arsenal as those he aims at shepherds and natives. Once again, the unwashed masses are ridiculed, though in this case tolerated, even encouraged, by Muir.

All sorts of human stuff is being poured into the Valley this year, and the blank, fleshly apathy with which most of it comes in contact with the rock and water spirits is most amazing. They climb sprawingly to their saddles like overgrown frogs pulling themselves up a stream bank through the bent sedges, ride up to the Valley with about as much emotion as the horses they ride upon—are comfortable when they have ‘done it all’ and long for the safety and flatness of their proper homes. The tide of visitors will float slowly about the bottom of the Valley as a harmless scum collecting in hotel and saloon eddies, leaving the rocks and falls eloquent as ever and instinct with imperishable beauty and greatness. (First Summer 221)

Muir realized that human visitors and the money they bring to local economies are necessary in order to preserve wilderness, but he never reconciles himself to the fact that many people come to the mountains as recreationists rather than spiritual supplicants:

It seems strange that visitors to Yosemite should be so little influenced by its novel grandeur, as if their eyes were bandaged and their ears stopped. Most of those I saw yesterday were looking down as if wholly
unconscious of anything going on about them, while the sublime rocks were trembling with the tones of the mighty chanting congregation of waters gathering from all the mountains round about, making music that might draw angels out of heaven. (First Summer 120)

Having trooped the Sierras as a Garden-Temple, he is aghast that some come to play rather than to worship:

Yet respectable-looking, even wise-looking people were fixing bits of worm on bent pieces of wire to catch trout. Sport they call it. Should church-goers try to pass the time fishing in baptismal fonts while dull sermons were being preached, the so-called sport might not be so bad; but to play in the Yosemite temple, seeking pleasure in the pain of fishes struggling for their lives, while God himself is preaching his sublimest water and stone sermons. (First Summer 190)

One of the greatest disappointments of Muir’s life occurred in 1871, when Ralph Waldo Emerson paid Muir and the valley a visit. Muir expected Emerson to come as a fellow worshipper, but to Muir’s deep regret the Concord sage arrived as a tourist. Muir had planned some outback camping for the party from Boston, but when they made themselves comfortable in the best hotel in the valley, Muir was disgusted: “His party, full of indoor philosophy, failed to see the natural beauty and fullness of promise of my wild plan, and laughed at it in good-natured ignorance, as if it were necessarily amusing to imagine that Boston people might be led to accept Sierra manifestations of God at the price of rough camping” (Our National Parks 145). Emerson was sixty-eight years old and not in good health, but for Muir, these were insufficient reasons to stay in a hotel: “In vain I urged, that only in homes and hotels were colds caught, that nobody was ever known to take cold camping in these woods, that there was not a single cough or sneeze
in the whole Sierra” (146). Despite Muir’s pleading, “the carpet dust and unknowable reeks were preferred” to “pure night air” (147). Muir, though he directed his ire at the men surrounding Emerson, could not hide his disappointment in the man himself, “I felt lonely, so sure had I been that Emerson of all men would be the quickest to see the mountains and sing them” (149).

Muir was most disappointed in Emerson because he came to Yosemite as a tourist not as a supplicant. It is ironic, though, that despite Muir’s low opinion of tourists, much of his life’s work can be seen as boosting tourism, encouraging people to visit Yosemite, other National Parks, and wild areas around the country. Muir took up writing very reluctantly, not only doubting his talent, but doubting the effectiveness of words to make any difference in people’s attitudes about nature: “what hope lies in pen-work? Only this: some may be incited by it to go and see for themselves” (Steep Trails 361). Muir’s hope was that his writing about wild land might inspire people to go see it for themselves; seeing it, they would love it; loving it, they would fight to protect it: “But the best words only hint its charms. Come to the mountains and see” (Mountains II: 235). It is a testament to Muir’s talents as a writer (and to the power of the written word which he initially doubted) that his writing’s inspired millions of people to join preservationist campaigns for wild places they had never seen, and I return to this point in Chapter Four.

Still, millions would come to see Yosemite for themselves, and many of those millions came (and still come) by way of the numerous invitations Muir sent out in his writings. For, although Muir scoffed at and caricatured “the tourist,” he thought the
mountains sacred enough to have a kind of sympathetic influence over even the most obtuse of them: "Up the mountains they go, high-heeled and high-hatted, laden like Christian with mortifications and mortgages of diverse sorts and degrees. But, whatever the motive, all will be in some measure benefited. None may wholly escape the good of Nature, however imperfectly exposed to her blessings" (Steep Trails 48). Muir believed so strongly in this that two of his later works, Our National Parks and The Yosemite, often read more like vacation guides than nature writing. In fact, Chapter VI of The Yosemite is titled "How Best To Spend One's Yosemite Time" and has one, two, and three day excursions mapped out and "guided" by Muir himself (222-254).

Tourism was abetted by a number of technological innovations in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Muir, for all his dislike of the bumptious tourist, needed the support of tourists and the tourism industry (most importantly the railroads) in order to have large tracts of land, like that of Yosemite National Park, set aside and "preserved." Muir, the preservationist, is caught arguing that "a large first-class hotel is very much needed" in Yosemite Valley (Yosemite 264). In the last ten years or so, eco-tourism has become a contentious topic in environmental politics, but many of the tensions, inconsistencies, and ambiguities being discussed today are evident in Muir's own time. Not only did Muir want a fine hotel in the valley, he applauded (as late as 1912) the building of new roads to and in wild areas and dismissed the impact of the automobile on wilderness (Bade 378-9). Ironically, the legal, governmental definition of wilderness today is based primarily on the lack of roads within a designated area.
At times, Muir seems naïve in his dismissal of the impact that humans can have on natural places:

“No one has attempted to carry out Anderson’s plan of making the [South] Dome accessible. For my part I should prefer leaving it in pure wildness, though, after all, no great damage could be done by tramping over it. The surface would be strewn with tin cans and bottles, but the winter gales would blow the rubbish away. Avalanches might strip off any sort of stairway or ladder that might be built. Blue jays and Clark crows have trodden the Dome for many a day, and so have beetles and chipmunks, and Tissiack would hardly be more ‘conquered’ or spoiled should man be added to her list of visitors. His louder scream and heavier scrambling would not stir a line of her countenance” (Yosemite 198).

Part of Muir’s lack of prescience here is that he had no way of knowing how the population of the country would grow exponentially in the twentieth century or how the personal automobile would utterly transform American culture. He had no way of knowing, after all, that over 3,000,000 people would visit Yosemite Valley in 1998 alone. If he knew this, it is safe to assume that he would not have encouraged off-trail hiking and camping as he does in The Yosemite. While this is true, there remains an obvious inconsistency in Muir’s preservationist ethic. Defining wilderness and its value in direct correlation to the absence of humans and human culture, but then promoting human visitation to wilderness (if only to its fringes) as the best way of preserving it, led to incommensurable wilderness attitudes (and behaviors) that severely damaged the Preservationists’ fight to save Hetch Hetchy.
The Wilderness As Garden

Muir’s favorite trope for wilderness is the Temple, but the Garden is a very close second. Although Muir never abandoned his biblically influenced rhetoric or his essentially spiritual understanding of nature, as he matured he increasingly substituted ‘Nature’ or ‘Beauty’ for ‘God’ and ‘the Lord’” (Wolfe 267). Understanding Muir’s metaphoric and mythic invocation of the Garden is crucial to understanding the debate that arose over the damming of Hetch Hetchy, for, unlike the trope of the Temple, the Garden was invoked by both sides in the debate. Both preservationists and conservationists drew upon the mythic power of this trope but for very different goals. The conservationists, who will be discussed in detail in the next chapter, emphasized the Garden as commons, a place to be worked, managed, and reaped; preservationists, such as Muir, emphasized the Garden as an island of sacredness, a place to be guarded, reverenced, and kept holy—a place where reaping was necessarily raping.

Muir’s prose is saturated with casual similes such as “groves and gardens fair as Eden” (First Summer 141) or “parks fair as Eden,—places in which one might expect to meet angels rather than bears” (Our National Parks 188). But for their significant repetition, these might be dismissed as insignificant and trite cliches. At times though, the myth and metaphor of the Garden become integral to Muir’s rhetorical intentions. In a particularly rich metaphoric passage, Muir conlates drama, landscape, and the creative capacities of God, and in the meantime reveals much about the preservationist myth of the Garden.
Who could ever guess that so rough a wilderness should yet be so fine, so full of good things. One seems to be in a majestic domed pavilion in which a grand play is being acted with scenery and music and incense,—all the furniture and action so interesting we are in no danger of being called on to endure one dull moment. God himself seems to be always doing his best work here, working like a man in a glow of enthusiasm. *(First Summer 60)*

Here, though, not using the word “garden,” Muir tells us much about his use of that myth. God is in this passage something like a stage director and the audience is asked to watch God at work. God is active, humans passive. In a later passage from *My First Summer*, God (here as “Nature”) is no longer stage director but a gardener doing very similar work: “How fiercely devoutly wild is Nature in the midst of her beauty-loving tenderness!—painting lilies, watering them, caressing them with gentle hand, going from flower to flower like a gardener while building rock mountains and cloud mountains full of lightning and rain” (133). The Garden, for Muir, is not a place for humans to work, but a place for humans to sit back and watch God at work. This is a crucial departure from the conservationist understanding of the Garden.

A passage from *A Thousand Mile Walk*... supports the notion that humans are observers (or readers) only in the Garden. God does the work: “Oh these forest gardens of our Father! What perfection, what divinity in their architecture! What simplicity and mysterious complexity of detail! Who shall read the teaching of these sylvan pages, the glad brotherhood of rills that sing in the valleys, and all the happy creatures that dwell in them under the tender keeping of a Father’s care” (39). Humans would be most presumptuous and arrogant to attempt the work of the Father-gardener. This
understanding of the Garden is indispensable to the preservationist *mythos* and critique of conservation. America was an Edenic Garden before the interference of humans: "The forests of America, however slighted by man, must have been a great delight to God; for they were the best He ever planted. The whole continent was a garden and from the beginning it seemed to be favored above all the other wild parks and gardens of the globe" (*Our National Parks* 357). Human meddling, especially on the scale proposed by the conservationists could only spoil the Garden. The two communities’ divergent perceptions of the same situation have much to do with their different understandings of this myth.

Not only did Muir see human work as inappropriate in the Garden, he believed that the Garden needed active protection from humans. Just as the first Eden, after the expulsion, had to be protected from human re-entry by seraphim with flaming swords, the American wilderness should be protected from shepherds and other trespassers:

> And to think that the sheep should be allowed in these lily meadows! after how many centuries of Nature’s care planting and watering them. Tucking the bulbs in snugly below winter frost, shading the tender shoots with clouds drawn above them like curtains, pouring refreshing rain, making them perfect in beauty, and keeping them safe by a thousand miracles; yet strange to say, allowing the trampling of devastating sheep. One might reasonably look for a wall of fire to fence such gardens.”
> (*First Summer* 94)

In the preservationist mythology, humans are not gardeners, but the destroyers of gardens: "So extravagant is Nature with her choicest treasures, spending plant beauty as she spends sunshine, pouring it forth into land and sea, garden and desert. And so the
beauty of lilies falls on angels and men, bears and squirrels, wolves and sheep, birds and bees, but as far as I have seen man alone, and the animals he tames, destroy these gardens” (First Summer 95). For Muir, and the preservationist community he helped to establish, only the select few among humans have the grace to appreciate God’s or Nature’s Garden; the masses of humans’ only relationship to the Garden is that of a dangerous, invading blight. While radically revising most of the Calvinist world-view into which he was born, Muir passionately retains the tenet that humankind is depraved and thus any human alteration of the wilderness must be destructive.

**Destruction of Wilderness**

What conservationists would see as the beneficent transformation of the Hetch Hetchy valley, preservationists could only see as the wanton destruction of that valley. Thus an understanding of Muir’s and other preservationists’ concept of destruction is crucial to understanding their part in the debate. As a naturalist, one of Muir’s most important contributions to geology was his theory of glaciation. Many respected geologists of the nineteenth century subscribed to a cataclysmic model of the Sierra’s formation, arguing that primeval, major geologic events such as massive earthquakes and Noachian floods were primarily responsible for the creation of the mountain’s dramatic peaks and valleys. Muir, after careful observations and the personal discovery of living glaciers no longer thought to exist, argued that the region’s geologic contours were the result, not of cataclysms, but of gradual, steady, and slow glaciation.
While today this disagreement might seem just a curious footnote in the history of geology, it had major theological implications in the nineteenth century. For the cataclysmic model upheld a view of creation as complete—the world of the nineteenth century was the finished world, as God had planned it. Muir’s theory of glacial sculpting suggested a world that was still very much in the process of being made. Muir held that creation was not something that occurred in the misty past, but that creation was visible to the living observer: “one learns that the world, though made, is yet being made, that this is still the morning of creation” (Travels 85). If the world in general, and wilderness in particular, are being made rather than already made, Muir had to admit change in the Garden. And he knew that this change was perceived by the human observer as destruction as well as creation. Over and over again in his writings, he insists that what appears to be destruction from our limited perspective is actually the tender pruning of a God of love, and that our recognition of this fact will lead us closer to God: “And when we bear in mind that all the present forests of the Sierra are young, growing on moraine soil recently deposited. And that the flank of the range itself, with all its landscapes, is newborn, recently sculptured, and brought to the light of day from beneath the ice mantle of the glacial winter, then a thousand lawless mysteries disappear, and broad harmonies take their places” (Mountains I: 219).

Muir realizes that a glacier creates only through destroying: “If among the agents that nature has employed in making these mountains there be one that above all others deserves the name of Destroyer, it is the glacier” (Our National Parks 106).
Apparent destruction is inevitable in a dynamic world, but Muir takes great pains to subsume this local destruction within a larger, cosmic creation: "Though the storm-beaten ground it is growing on is nearly half a mile high, the glacier centuries ago flowed over it as a river flows over a boulder; but out of all the cold darkness and glacial crushing and grinding comes this warm, abounding beauty and life to teach us that what we in our faithless ignorance and fear call destruction is creation finer and finer" (Travels 323). Glaciers, in fact, are the divine agents of God: "Glaciers came down from heaven, and they were angels with folded wings, white wings of snowy bloom" (Bade 268).

He explains other dynamic natural phenomena similarly. Volcanism, which plays an analogous role in Yellowstone to that of glaciation in Yosemite, is described by Muir in all its dramatic violence, but then he reminds the reader, "Of course this destruction was creation, progress in the march of beauty towards death" (Our National Parks 70), and that great beauty comes from ashes. A massive windstorm in Yosemite destroyed hundreds of ancient trees in the valley in 1870, but Muir assures the reader that these storms have recurred numerous times through the millennia, and, "the manifest result of all this wild storm-culture is the glorious perfection we behold; then faith in Nature's forestry is established, and we cease to deplore the violence of her most destructive gales, or of any other storm-implement whatsoever" (Mountains I: 273). Even a major earthquake, which frightened valley residents in 1869, was for Muir just a sign of nature's maternal goodwill and mild chastening. To relieve a man frightened by the earthquake, Muir says, 'Come, cheer up; smile a little and clasp your hands, now that
kind Mother Earth is trotting us upon her knee to amuse us and make us good” (Our National Parks 287). We do not know how the man responded.

For Muir, natural destruction, as opposed to human destruction, has to be seen as creation: “Storms of every sort, torrents, earthquakes, cataclysms, ‘convulsions of nature,’ etc., however mysterious and lawless at first sight they may seem, are only harmonious notes in the song of creation, varied expressions of God’s love” (Our National Parks 289). Evil could not be admitted in Muir’s Garden:

“And I know something about ‘the blasted trunk, and the barren rock, the moaning of the bleak winds, the solemn solitudes of moors and seas, the roar of the black, perilous, merciless whirlpools of mountain streams’; and they have a language for me, but they declare nothing of wrath or hell, only Love plain as was ever spoken” (Bade 378).

Muir could in no way, however, allow that human destruction might, from another perspective be seen as an act of creation, and this is key, for that is precisely what the conservationists would argue. Upon the arrival of Europeans on her shores, the Edenic forests of North America faced a destroyer that, at times, Muir seems convinced is unquenchable: “But when the steel axe of the white man rang out on the startled air their doom was sealed. Every tree heard the bodedful sound, and pillars of smoke gave sign in the sky” (Our National Parks 361). Whereas Nature destroys to create, humans are merely ruinous: “Great trees and groves used to be venerated as sacred monuments and halls of council and worship, but after the discovery of the Calaveras Grove, one of the grandest trees was cut down for the sake of the stump! The laborious vandals had
seen 'the biggest tree in the world,' then forsooth, they must try to see the biggest stump and dance on it" *(Our National Parks* 302).

Muir paints a bleak portrait of manifest destiny. While others of his day sang the praises of the rugged, virtuous settler transforming waste into garden, Muir saw westward moving settlers as an “invading horde of destroyers” practicing “ruthless devastation” and leaving only “melancholy ruins” *(Our National Parks* 361-363). Where others saw transformation, Muir could only see devastation: “The great wilds of our country, once held to be boundless and inexhaustible, are being rapidly invaded and overrun in every direction, and everything destructible in them is being destroyed” *(Steep Trails* 104). Muir could allow, and indeed praise, transformative processes in nature, but his unwillingness to see any human activity as anything other than destructive is a troubling element of preservationism. As illustrated in subsequent chapters, this inconsistency, too, is symptomatic of a false binary between the human and the natural—a binary that stifled effective dialogue in the Hetch Hetchy debate, and continues to trouble American environmentalism today. When nature is constructed as “other,” humans and all their activities can only be regarded as unnatural and out of place in the wilderness.

**Muir’s Influence**

By the turn of the century, and well before his involvement in the Hetch Hetchy debate, Muir was perceived by millions as *the* voice for wilderness in the United States. The wandering vagabond who entered Yosemite in 1867 had by the end of the century become a national celebrity. As Roderick Nash puts it, “Muir’s books were minor best
sellers, and the nation's foremost periodicals competed for his essays. The best universities tried to persuade him to join their faculties, and when unsuccessful, settled for his acceptance of honorary degrees. As a publicizer of the American wilderness, Muir had no equal" (Wilderness 122).

Part of the growing popularity of Muir's writing was due to an increased ecological literacy among the reading public. According to an historian of the era, Samuel Hays, public schools of the time "exposed students to an increasingly broad subject matter; in the changing high school curriculum young people came to know a wider world of human geography and natural science. The predominant science of the mid- and late nineteenth century was natural history, which included geology, botany, and zoology" (Response 29). This education coincided with a boom in magazine sales in the late nineteenth century, and most nature writers, like Muir, were first published in these magazines.

Donald Worster, however, emphasizes that although nature writing of the era does satisfy a growing scientific curiosity among lay people, nature writing's appeal was deeper: "What is important is the need felt by these nature essayists to locate a compelling image of an alternative world and an alternative science; that, after all, is the principle function of myth—not to establish facts but to create powerful symbols and designs that can explain the inner core of human experience and provide dreams to live by" (Worster 20). Muir, perhaps most obviously of all the popular nature writers of the day, connected with his readership on a mythic level. It is worth considering how and why Muir, who as has been demonstrated held some obviously provocative and
contentious positions, could find rapport and forge an identity with an audience who bore little outward resemblance to him.

Part of Muir’s appeal lay in his own ethos—he was often portrayed as a sort of mythic figure himself. Mark Stoll notes that, “The sight of Muir, long beard flowing in the breeze, descending from the Sierras caused visitors to recall images of prophets returning from the wilderness” (Miller 73). Of course in the rhetorical model, the speaker is very much an element of the discourse itself, and by all contemporaneous accounts Muir had a charismatic presence. As one critic argues, “If identification [rather than logic or reason] is the key to persuasion, the human character is, itself, a formidable rhetorical tool.” Character “is not something behind the force of an argument; character, in many instances, is the force of the argument” (Baumlin 4).

A taste of the ethos perceived by Muir’s original audience is captured by one of his early biographers. Muir is constructed as no mere human, but a super-hero of the wild: “The divine Logos was with him from the beginning. His philosophy came not from plodding among syllogisms, but sprang full-grown from the unconscious” (Wolfe ix). He was “John Muir, bestriding the landscape like a colossus.” He saved a man from imminent death by “holding him with his great steel muscled arms,” and “With the strength of ten he climbed exultant, without pausing to take breath” (Wolfe 194, 207, 156). Although this is almost comic (though intended as sincere) flattery from an admirer, Muir contributed much to this self-image: “Many times I was put to my mettle, but with a firm-braced nerve, all the more unflinching as the dangers thickened, I worked out of that terrible ice-web, and with blood fairly up Stickeen and I ran over uncommon
danger without fatigue” (Travels 306). According to one more recent biographer, “he was in danger of becoming not the publicizer of parks, but the product being sold” (Cohen 265).

Muir’s popularity, though, was due to more than just his heroic persona. His unabashed spiritualization of nature appealed to a generation for whom science was apparently stripping away all mystery from nature. When Ellery Sedgwick, editor of the Atlantic Monthly, read over the manuscript of My First Summer in the Sierra, he wrote Muir “I felt almost as if I had found religion” (Wolfe 328). Burke holds that “We interest a man by dealing with his interests” (Permanence and Change 55). And though wilderness would seem to be far removed from the interests of most late-nineteenth century Americans, Muir’s myth of the Garden appealed to a pervasive cultural anxiety of the day.

Many Americans, according to Roderick Nash, were worried that they and their fellow citizens were becoming over-civilized: “With its wild country largely developed, American civilization was no longer becoming: it had become. Unprepared to accept the implications of change, people grew critical of the urban environment, nostalgic for a return to nature” (Nash Call 3). Theodore Roosevelt was calling for a rejection of ease and luxury and a return to “the strenuous life.” In 1893, Frederick Jackson Turner presented his influential thesis, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” in which he argued that confrontation with an ever-present frontier had shaped the national character. With the 1890 census declaring the frontier no longer existent, many feared a subsequent degeneration of the national character. Wilderness, which can be
seen as the frontier's frontier, became a receptacle for national values that many feared were being lost. As Neil Evernden has pointed out, "Nature, ambiguously regarded as a fact of direct experience and as the domain of the natural and the inevitable, seems the ideal preservative for our cherished ideals" (25). The preservation of wilderness could contain within it the preservation of much more than just land and biotic communities. Nash argues that in the late nineteenth century a nagging "belief persisted that the United States, if not the entire western world, had seen its greatest moments and was in an incipient state of decline" (Wilderness 144). Muir's Edenic Garden provided Americans with a locus for their longing for the past, or, more accurately, their longing for what had never been. 

This nostalgia was compounded by an uneasiness about the dizzying rate of innovations experienced by Americans of the time. Henry Adams eloquently captured this anxiety:

Power seemed to have outgrown its servitude and to have asserted its freedom. The cylinder had exploded, and thrown great masses of stone and steam against the sky. The city had the air and movement of hysteria, and the citizens were crying in every accent of anger and alarm, that the new forces must at any cost be brought under control. Prosperity never before imagined, power never yet wielded by man, speed never reached by anything but a meteor, had made the world irritable, nervous, querulous, unreasonable and afraid. (499)

Changes in technology caused changes in cultural patterns and life ways; Muir's Garden promised stasis. As Stephen Fox puts it "American society kept reinventing itself, nature offered stability" (138). The best explanation of Muir's popularity
among (and influence upon) an audience far removed from his rugged lifestyle is that he struck a mythic chord that resonated for an urban people afraid they might be caught in the devil's bargain, and wanting, somehow, to get back to the Garden. In the next chapter I illustrate how many Americans, rather than attempting to rediscover original Eden in the wild, set about to recreate the wilderness into a new Garden.

1 Roderick Nash warns that "the question of representativeness—how many Americans really shared a particular attitude—haunts the cultural historian" (Call 2). I return to the question of representativeness in the fourth chapter when exploring how the distinct communities, which I will introduce and explore through focusing on the individuals Muir and Pinchot, clashed over Hetch Hetchy.

2 As just one example, the automobile was introduced in 1895, but by 1909 there were 3,000,000 registered autos (Huth 188).

3 Muir immigrated to the U.S. with his father, from Scotland, in 1849, at age eleven.

4 This observation was made famous by Henry Adams in The Education of Henry Adams: "[T]he American boy of 1854 stood nearer the year 1 than to the year 1900" (53). Interestingly, Adams' and Muir's life spans coincided (1838-1914).

5 This perspective refutes that of Linnie Marsh Wolfe and other Muir biographers who represent him as an isolated, original genius: "Muir was himself an original. He was never warped out of his own orbit or made a satellite to any man or system of thinking" (Wolfe 80).

6 The text here, and in all further quotations from the Bible, is from the King James Authorized version, the translation John Muir knew.

7 A notion that some contemporary Christians, including Vice-President Al Gore, argue allows for an ecological and Bible-based understanding of nature.

8 Wilderness in the Old Testament is desert land, and is translated in some versions as "desert" rather than wilderness, but the King James version is consistent in its translation of desert "wasteland" as "wilderness."

9 Most of the evils visited upon Egypt by Jehovah—are of an obviously "natural" even "wild" nature: frogs, flies, infectious parasites, hail, locusts, darkness.
All of these are trees with material, economic value.

Interestingly enough, this iconoclasm, according to Daniel J. Boorstin, while retarding the representational graphic arts, led to a rich and sensuous nature poetry among the Hebrews.

Daniel is perhaps best described as a protestant sectarian, who throughout his life joined, and quit, a number of denominations, all fundamentalist. Stephen Fox says that he “was a Christian zealot who spent his life looking for a church that met his exacting standards” (28). He never found it.

Here, as elsewhere, it should be kept in mind that this is “John of the Mountains” in his seventies, recalling his childhood thoughts, and thus should be taken with a grain of salt.

The exclamation point, not overly used by Muir, indicates that he knew he was being outrageous, and wanted the reader to know he knew.

Muir was captured by Darwin’s model of a common creation, but he disdained the model’s reliance on “competition” and “strife” as catalysts of evolution.

As far as I can determine, the verbal “tophetization” is Muir’s coinage. Tophet is a place name, from the Old Testament, of a site where children were sacrificed to the god Moloch.

This prayer is uncomfortably reminiscent of the conclusion arrived at by some radical environmentalists of our day, who hold that the best hope for the planet is the extinction of humankind through thermonuclear holocaust.

Jean Carr, the wife of one of Muir’s professors at the University of Wisconsin, was one his most frequent correspondents during his first summer in Yosemite.

Muir’s faith in the beneficence of nature and his low regard for many humans took him to some utterly callous observations. Of the Donner party which was reduced to cannibalism in the Sierras just a few years before his arrival there, he notes: “They were not good mountaineers.... The whole winter could have been spent delightfully in so beautiful a spot” (Wolfe 177).


Two hotels were already in operation in the valley when Muir first arrived.

Chief among these was the joining of western to the eastern seaboard by rail in 1869 and the invention of the Kodak camera in 1888.

See the Wilderness Act of 1964.
24 Withheld from Muir's hagiography is the fact that he dodged the draft in the Civil War and that the chief proponent of American wilderness did not become a citizen until age 65, and then only so he could get a passport.

25 This longing was also displayed in a sudden interest in genealogy and the formation of exclusive patriotic and hereditary societies, such as: The Sons of the Revolution, 1883; the Colonial Dames, 1890; the Daughters of the American Revolution, 1890; and the Society of Mayflower Descendants, 1894 (Jones 330).
CHAPTER 3

GIFFORD PINCHOT AND THE WORKING GARDEN

Just as Muir represented the preservationist community, Gifford Pinchot articulated the basic orientations and values of conservationism and acted as one of the leading public advocates of that world-view. In this chapter, I explore the conservationist *mythos* of wilderness and focus specifically on how this community embraced a variant understanding of the Garden and promulgated an oppositional version of that myth. As Carolyn Merchant points out, in *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution*, the myth of Eden has had multiple and mutually antagonistic interpretations throughout western history. She describes the nature perceived by Muir and other preservationists as “original Eve,” a nature that is “virgin, pure, and light.” The mythic nature perceived by conservationists such as Pinchot was that of “Mother Eve” wherein nature is an improved garden, a nurturing earth bearing fruit, a ripened ovary, maturity” (137). In this chapter, I look at the conservationist *mythos* through the life and writings of its most prominent advocate.

By situating Pinchot as Muir’s nemesis (and vice versa) I only intend to demonstrate the distance between the two rhetorical communities they represent. I do
not suggest that Pinchot and Muir represent polar positions within environmental discourse. That Muir and Pinchot were both *interested* in the use (or non-use) of undeveloped lands at the turn of the century indicates that they shared a common interest not shared by many of their contemporaries. Although the Hetch Hetchy debate was a major domestic issue in its day, many, if not most, Americans had little interest or even knowledge of the controversy. Others, who were interested, might be most kindly described as the free-use community. This group, which believed in the right to exploit natural resources without any regulation or government interference whatsoever, are more properly positioned as the polar opposite to *both* conservationists and preservationists. Thus, while in this chapter Gifford Pinchot is often described as the antithesis of John Muir, this polarity, while effectively demonstrating the divergence between the two rhetorical communities they represent, is relatively local. In fact, one of the interesting aspects of the Hetch Hetchy debate is that it, for the first time, highlighted the disparity between conservationists and preservationists, a disparity not recognized by many before that controversy. I see this point as crucial, and will return to it in my concluding chapter, because this rupture between conservationists and preservationists has weakened the ability of both groups to resist the arguments and actions of free-use advocates.

**A Forest Calling**

Gifford Pinchot was born in Pennsylvania in 1865, just two years before John Muir, then 28, experienced his life-transforming Sierra ecstasy. Pinchot was born in the
lap of luxury, both his maternal and paternal grandfathers were wealthy men, and his father had made his own fortune in the timber industry. His family was well-ensconced in East-coast high society, and Gifford, despite extensive travels in the West that he would make later in his life, was very much an Easterner. This fact, as will be demonstrated, had an important effect on his perceived ethos and he was very self-conscious (and defensive) of this effect throughout his career as a forester.\(^1\) Whereas Muir’s wilderness orientation involved a dramatic break from his father’s world-view, Pinchot, by all accounts, adopted his own father’s world-view without modification. In fact, James Pinchot suggested that his son become a forester, and though his grandfather discouraged Gifford (because forestry seemed no way to increase a fortune), Gifford agreed with his father’s suggestion.

His father’s advice is notable in more ways than one. First, his father had increased the family fortune through exploitative timber cutting. One biographer has speculated that his encouragement of Gifford’s forestry career was an attempt to assuage his own guilty feelings about the destructive timber practices that had built his personal fortune (McGeary 30).\(^2\) In addition, his father’s career advice was significant in that there was no such thing as a forester in the United States at the time. As Gifford put it: “They spoke of forestry, but they thought only of forest preservation. The actual practice of Forestry—forest management for continuous production—if they had ever grasped what it meant, was something far outside the field of practical affairs” \((Breaking\ 1)\).

Forestry was something practiced in western Europe, and it was there that young Gifford was sent to learn forest science. The uniqueness of his career path, and the fact
that Gifford, upon returning to the United States, could lay claim to being the only
forester in the entire country, allowed him to embrace forestry with a missionary spirit
not unlike Muir's proselytizing advocacy of wilderness protection. Pinchot had learned a
truth in Europe that the benighted people of his own country desperately needed to hear:
"When I came home not a single acre of Government, state, or private timberland was
under systematic forest management anywhere on the most richly timbered of all
continents. The American people had no idea of what forestry was or their bitter need
for it" (Breaking..., 27).

Being Useful

Gifford Pinchot was deeply concerned, throughout his life, with usefulness.
Having been born to wealth, he did not need to work and could have enjoyed a life of
ease, but idle leisure was not for him; as a teenager, he "had a lively and deep seated
desire to be of use in the world" (Breaking 5). The purpose of human existence,
according to Pinchot, was to be useful, and the purpose of nature was to be used.
Pinchot's European education in forestry led him to see the abuse of forests in the United
States as a national crime. Pinchot's training as a forester taught him that the only good
forest is a money-making forest, and he saw no point in preserving forests for strictly
spiritual or aesthetic use: "Forest reserves were made to be used, not just to look at"
(Breaking 125), and he urged that the timber, water, pasture, mineral, and other resources
of the forest reserves be used by the people of the nation (Breaking 266). In March 1903,
Pinchot declared to the Society of American Foresters that forestry's objective "is not to
preserve the forests because they are beautiful... or because they are refuges for the wild creatures of the wilderness, but for the making of prosperous homes” (Hays 42).

Eventually, as Chief Forester of the United States, Pinchot would grant permits within the Reserves for “canals, ditches, flumes, pipe lines, tunnels, dams, tanks, reservoirs, private railroads, telegraph, telephone or electric power lines, and buildings” (Breaking 268). As Samuel Hays puts it, Pinchot and other “apostles of the gospel of efficiency subordinated the aesthetic to the utilitarian. Preservation of natural scenery... in their scheme of things, remained subordinate to increasing industrial productivity” (127).

Pinchot’s ideas about forestry all had, as their fundamental basis, the belief that a forest has value only in relation to its usefulness to humans: “The central idea of the Forester, in handing the forest, is to perpetuate its greatest use to men” (Training 23), and “Forestry is the art of producing from the forest whatever it can yield for the service of man” (Training 13). Pinchot’s utilitarian environmental ethic extends beyond the forest to all of non-human nature: “Next to the earth itself, the forest is the most useful servant of man” (Primer II: 7). Over and over again in his writings, Pinchot represents the forests as service-providers to humans; forestry “is the art of handling the forest so that it will render whatever service is required of it” (Training 13). Appropriately, the primary field manual for Forest Rangers that Pinchot published in 1905 was titled The Use of the National Forest Reserves and was soon referred to, and has been known ever since, as, simply, The Use Book (Breaking..., 264).³

This strict utilitarianism led Pinchot to a strident ontological binary similar to that of Muir and the preservationists: “There are just two things on this material earth—people
and natural resources” (Breaking 325), but, unlike the preservationists who elevated the non-human above that of the human, this dichotomy allowed Pinchot to construct the non-human as intrinsically valueless. It had value only in relation to human use. This caused him to see all efforts at forest preservation as unworthy of his consideration. He was especially irritated by the Adirondack State Forest Preserve (now Adirondacks State Park) which the New York state legislature had set aside in 1885 and declared to be “forever kept as wild forest land.” Pinchot states: “I have always regarded the sentimental horror of some good citizens at the idea of utilizing the timber of the Adirondack Reserve as unintelligent, misdirected, and shortsighted’ (Breaking 182). Likewise, he criticized the 1872 creation of Yellowstone National Park because it was not “a forest for the production of timber, but a park in which cutting, and therefore forestry, were forbidden” (Breaking 26). Anyone wanting to preserve a forest could not be taken seriously by Pinchot, a man who believed that “the most effective tool that the human mind and hand have ever made is the American axe” (Fight 75).

Pinchot’s thoughts about sheep-grazing on public lands further illustrate his unswerving commitment to use above all other considerations. Like Muir, Pinchot never met a sheep he liked: “Perhaps I should confess here that I hate a sheep, and the smell of a sheep... I have seen too much of the sheep’s power to destroy” (Breaking 270). Like Muir, Pinchot knew how harmful sheep were to grasslands, meadows, and forests due to erosion and the destruction of seedlings and saplings; but unlike Muir, Pinchot did not call for their prohibition. He saw the sheep’s presence as injurious, but unavoidable: “Yet sheep had to come... because the full use of the range required it” (Breaking 269).
For Pinchot, maximizing use outweighed any other consideration, and he trusted that through careful management and supervision sheep owners could (and should) use the public lands to their fullest efficient extent. Whereas Muir and other preservationists saw western wild lands as sacred groves and consecrated temples, conservationists like Pinchot saw those lands as commercial units, and the language with which they describe public land is purely economic. If you travel through any National Forest today, you see Pinchot’s legacy on the prominent road signs, for example:

Wayne National Forest
Land of Many Uses
U.S Department of Agriculture

Economic Nature

In 1889, Pinchot enrolled in the French Forest School at Nancy. European forestry, especially in France and Germany, had developed a strictly utilitarian valuation of forests. This valuation reflects the fact that for centuries western Europe had been crowded with people and short on forests; every square acre of forest land, it was believed, had to be used as efficiently as possible. As will be discussed further below, the forests of the United States had been, up to the very end of the nineteenth century, perceived as limitless; few nineteenth century Americans could imagine that the continent’s vast woodlands might be in danger of disappearing. At the end of 1890, when Pinchot returned to the United States, he was among a small minority of
Americans, even at that late date, who believed that the nation's natural resources were dwindling; and within that minority most felt, with Muir, that the solution lay in protecting natural areas from development. Pinchot returned with far different ideas.

Pinchot’s two years of study in Europe (at Nancy and through visits to forests throughout the continent) had encouraged him to look at a forest not as a sacred garden deserving protection from humans, but as a working garden desperately needing thoughtful, professional human management. His course of study at Nancy was divided into three areas, only one of which, Silviculture, directly considered the forest as a living entity. The other two fields were Forest Law and Forest Administration. He studied such concepts as forest capital, rent, interest, and sustained yield (or “how to get out of the forest the most of whatever it is you want”). The overall pedagogical goal of the school at Nancy was to teach its students how to “make a forest pay” (Breaking 29). Upon his return to the U.S., Pinchot took a job with the multi-millionaire, George Vanderbilt, as forest consultant on his huge Appalachian estate, Biltmore. Pinchot jumped at the chance to work for Vanderbilt, not because he hoped to make money (he received not much more than reimbursement for his expenses), but because Biltmore provided an opportunity to practice what he had learned in Europe: “It was the first piece of woodland in the United States to be put under a regular system of forest management whose object was to pay the owner while improving the forest” (Breaking 50). At Biltmore, a private estate, Pinchot was able to apply and test the forestry principles that he would later apply to lands in the public domain.4
Where Muir used the rhetoric of religion to describe his relationship to nature, Pinchot, throughout his life, used the rhetoric of business. He refers to a forest as a “factory of wood” that has to be efficiently managed by a trained forester to insure “better returns from investments” (*Breaking* 77). Pinchot, and the European forestry he imported, brought such terms as “board feet” and “stumpage” (a brutally honest term for the amount of harvestable timber within a given area of forest) to the description of American forests. These terms are still in use, and still found very distasteful to many preservationists. One can imagine Muir’s response to Pinchot’s declaration that what the Yosemite wilderness most needs is “a plan of management” (*Breaking* 45). Although Pinchot’s fight for control of the American Forest Reserves would take many years and much hard work, his efforts were helped by the fact that a business ethic, well documented by historians of the era, was gaining more and more cultural and political currency.

By 1900, Pinchot had convinced a number of powerful men in the country that his business managerial approach to forests was the best policy. In a 1901 address, Theodore Roosevelt declared that “The preservation of our forests is an imperative business necessity... Their usefulness should be increased by a thoroughly businesslike management” (*Breaking* 190). In *The Fight For Conservation*, Pinchot put it bluntly: “Business prudence and business commonsense indicate as strongly as anything can the absolute necessity of a change in point of view on the part of the people of the United States regarding their natural resources. The way we have been handling them is not good business” (77). This economic valuation and businesslike management of forests
motivated Pinchot to court the big timber companies and to construct the trained forester as the friend of and co-worker with big business. "To arrive at a practicable plan the forester and the lumbermen must dovetail their functions" (Breaking 185). And what seems like a blatant conflict of interests—the fact that Pinchot's incipient federal Division of Forestry solicited and received direct donations from big timber interests—is proudly pointed out by Pinchot as an example of how forestry and business can work together (Breaking 170).

While Pinchot eagerly embraced big business, it must be emphasized that he had no love for the laissez faire economic philosophy which was ascendant at the time. Unregulated, amoral business in pursuit of maximum profit, or what Muir called "the gobble gobble school of economics" (Wolfe 102), was exactly what Pinchot and the conservationists saw as their greatest enemy. It should be kept in mind, and I will return to it below, that conservationists, at least until 1908, did not see preservationists as much of a threat. They feared big business without a social conscience or sense of national obligation. According to Richard Slotkin, conservationists such as Pinchot, believed in business, even big business, but only if it was organized, managed, and disciplined (Fatal 290). Pinchot, of course, held that he and other trained specialists were just the men to organize, manage, and discipline big business. What the American Garden needed was not border patrol agents to defend its sacristy, but expert gardeners to make it pay.
Working the Garden

Like the preservationists, conservationists invoked the myth of Eden to rationalize and validate their notion of the proper relationship between humans and nature; their versions of the myth, however, were markedly different. Whereas preservationists saw remnants of Eden in the fragments of land left unchanged by human economy, conservationists believed that Eden could be reclaimed through beneficent human agency—in other words, the Creator’s task could be assumed by His highest creation. Carolyn Merchant holds that this reclamation effort has motivated and shaped human “progress” for the last three hundred years, especially in the Americas:

But beginning in the seventeenth century and proceeding to the present, New World colonists have undertaken a massive effort to reinvent the whole earth in the image of the Garden of Eden. Aided by the Christian doctrine of redemption and the inventions of science, technology, and capitalism..., the long-term goal of the recovery project has been to turn the earth itself into a vast cultivated garden. (Merchant 134)

While preservationists stuck on the point of humans’ fallen nature, Pinchot and other conservationists embraced the human capacity for salvation of the spirit and redemption of the Garden.

Whereas Muir believed that non-human nature was perfect, even immaculate, in itself, Pinchot insisted that nature could always bear improvement. This perspective is illustrated in Pinchot’s consistent and adamant representation of the forest as a crop. He says of his experiences in the managed forests of Nancy that “they gave me my first
concrete understanding of the forest as a crop" (*Breaking* 13). These model forests “were divided at regular intervals by perfectly straight paths and roads at right angles to each other” (*Breaking* 13), and these forests, constrained by uniform grids, provided Pinchot “a standard against which to check [his] future work” (*Breaking* 19). In his autobiography and history of the early forest service in the United States, Pinchot repeatedly and bluntly emphasizes the relationship between forests and agriculture: “Forestry is Tree Farming. Forestry is handling trees so that one crop follows another. To grow trees as a crop is forestry” (*Breaking* 31). And, like a farm, forests are improved by the diligent, efficient farmer/forester: “A well-handled farm gets more and more productive as the years pass. So does a well-handled forest” (*Breaking* 31). I discuss Pinchot’s creation of the U.S. Forest Service below, but it is relevant here to point out that much of his effort in its creation involved taking the Forest Division out of the Department of the interior and placing it in the Department of Agriculture. The conservationist valuation of nature stands directly opposed to the preservationist valuation—where Muir valued nature in direct correlation to the absence of humans in the land, Pinchot believed nature valueless until humanized.

This will to humanize, to impose order on the forests, is clearly in line with the Enlightenment perspective that “human material development is paramount, progressive, benevolent, and inevitable” (Miller 9). This will to order, according to Max Oelschlager, has a profound impact on the perceived ontological status of the nature being ordered. The management model “preclude[s] recognition of nature as a spontaneous and naturally organized system to which all parts are harmoniously interrelated (8).
According to some critics, this model, by stripping nature of inherent value, allows it to be treated as lifeless matter. Although conservationists argue strenuously for the efficient control of nature, their construction of nature as spiritless matter plays into the hands of the exploitationists. For “if nature is dead, there are no restraints on exploiting it for profit” (Berman 126). Carolyn Merchant has argued that much of the blame for our current environmental crises can be located in this construction of nature as mere matter, because for millennia, “the image of the earth as a living organism and nurturing mother had served as a cultural constraint restricting the actions of human beings” (3), but once spirit was stripped from our understanding of nature “the process of mechanizing the world picture removed the controls over environmental exploitation that were an inherent part of the organic view that nature was alive, sensitive, and responsive to human actions” (Merchant 111).

According to Oelschlager, the conservationist understanding of the Garden “represents the transformation of modern people from homo religiosus to homo economicus” (286). For the conservationist, undeveloped nature has only potential, not inherent value. In the strict preservationist orientation, humans are craven despoilers of unfallen nature; in the strict conservationist view, humans are the noble redeemers of fallen nature. Both communities claim to love and care for nature, but both love with a love that objectifies nature and distances humans from it.
Pinchot's "Love" of Nature

Pinchot's utilitarian language and insistence on improving nature might lead one to conclude that he was completely dispassionate about non-human nature or even bore animosity towards it, but this is not the case. In his autobiography he claims that he chose the career of forestry not knowing much at all about it, only being certain that "at least a forester worked in the woods and with the woods--and I loved the woods and everything about them" (Breaking 2). At times, his descriptions of nature would not seem out of place in one of Muir's own books. Of the Grand Canyon, he exclaims "A man can only wonder. At sunset it is magnificently beautiful, and by moonlight magnificently terrible. But the great power of it lies in its serenity. It is absolute peace" (Breaking 42). Of one of Muir's favorite haunts, the Mariposa Grove in the Sierras, he records, "But the glory and dignity of that supernal forest I shall never forget" (Breaking 44). Elsewhere he describes the Montana Rockies as reaching "a summit of wildness and beauty I am incompetent to describe" (Breaking 97). And, in his handbook on forestry, he claims that "the forest is as beautiful as it is useful. The old fairy tales which spoke of it as a terrible place are wrong. No one can really know the forest without feeling the gentle influence of the kindliest and strongest parts of nature. From every point of view it is one of the most helpful friends of man" (Primer I: 8). Here in "the gentle influence," he describes something approaching a spiritual potential for the forest, although, characteristically, he ends the thought by reiterating the forest's utility.
Just as Pinchot did not think of himself as bearing any rancor towards nature, he
did not vilify preservationists. Again, bear in mind that Pinchot did not see
preservationists, at least before the Hetch Hetchy controversy, as a threat—the real
enemies were the selfish and ruthless exploiters of nature. At times he speaks of
preservationists with genuine regard and respect, although distancing himself from their
agenda: “They deserve much credit for their unselfish devotion. And without question
they were of real use in spreading a doctrine which they called Forestry but which in fact
was forest preservation—a very different thing” (Breaking 28). And, he asserts that
“individually they were among our best and most enlightened people” (Breaking 28). He
considers preservationists to be well-intentioned, but misguided and, ultimately,
ineffectual: “They tried to stop the advance of one of the greatest, most necessary, and
most thriving and driving of industries simply by explaining to each other how wrong and
ruthless it was” (Breaking 28). The preservationists’ error and the source of their
impotence lay, according to Pinchot, in their inability to see forests and other natural
entities in the light of business capitalism: “Their eyes were closed to the economic
motive behind true forestry. They hated to see a tree cut down. So do I, and the chances
are that you do too, but you cannot practice forestry without it” (Breaking 28).

On more than one page of his autobiography, Pinchot speaks specifically of his
deep respect and genuine affection for John Muir. In the summer of 1896, Muir traveled
with Pinchot and the Forestry Commission through Montana, Washington, Oregon,
California and Arizona. Pinchot, who was not expecting Muir to be on the trip, writes of
first meeting him: “To my great delight John Muir was with them. In his late fifties, tall,
thin, cordial, and a most fascinating talker, I took to him at once. It amazed me to learn that he never carried even a fishhook with him on his solitary explorations. He said fishing wasted too much time” (Breaking 100). Pinchot was one of many admirers of Muir’s adventure stories told in Scottish brogue: “John Muir. . . made the journey short with talk that was worth crossing the continent to hear” (Breaking 101). On one occasion, Pinchot had the opportunity to enjoy the Grand Canyon with Muir and they “spent an unforgettable day on the rim of the prodigious chasm, letting it soak in” (103). Unfortunately, we know almost nothing of their conversation that day and the following night which they spent camping near the rim.² We do know about one minor altercation over an arachnid: “When we came across a tarantula he wouldn’t let me kill it. He said it had as much right there as we had” (Breaking 103). In his autobiography, Pinchot lets Muir’s biocentric assertion stand uncontested, and says of their night together by the Canyon: “It was such an evening as I had never had before or since” (103). In another book, Pinchot even seems to endorse Muir’s anti-materialism: “A friend of mine, John Muir, says the best advice he can give young men is: ‘Take time to get rich.’ His idea of getting rich is to fill his mind and spirit full with observations of the nature he so deeply loves and so well understands; so that in his mind it is not money which makes riches, but life in the open and the seeing eye” (Training 66). Even though the two men were outspoken leaders of opposite camps in the acrimonious Hetch Hetchy battle, and Pinchot could no longer call Muir a friend after that controversy erupted, there is no record that Pinchot ever said a word against John Muir publicly.
Destruction and Waste

Despite Pinchot’s respect for Muir, the two were preaching very different sermons. Muir worked to spread the Gospel of the Wild, while Pinchot devoted himself to spreading the Gospel of Efficiency; both men worked to establish communities of believers who would proselytize for the true faith. These opposing world-views, while both concerned with the fate of non-human nature, led to vastly divergent, and ultimately incommensurable, ethical approaches to nature. A point of comparison that starkly reveals this divergence is in the two communities’ disparate understandings of natural destruction and waste.

The late nineteenth century in the United States was an era of unrestricted and rapacious resource exploitation. Samuel Hays, one of the most respected historians of that era, describes what was happening as the “great industrial barbecue” (Response 94). When Pinchot returned from Europe, he recognized that “the American Colossus was fiercely intent on appropriating and exploiting the riches of the richest of all continents—grasping with both hands, reaping where he had not sown, wasting what he thought would last forever” (Breaking 23). Pinchot committed himself not to slaying this Colossus, but to reeducating it, and much of the remainder of the chapter describes Pinchot’s educational efforts. I want here, however, to reemphasize that for Pinchot non-use was as grave a sin as mis-use: “There may be just as much waste in neglecting the development and use of certain natural resources as there is in their destruction” (Breaking 45).
This understanding caused Pinchot to see natural destruction in a much different light from Muir. Whereas Muir went to great lengths to subsume all “natural” destruction within a larger cosmic order of love and creation, Pinchot would have none of that. He vilifies the natural phenomena that Muir sanctifies: “The forest is threatened by many enemies... fire, wind, lightning, floods, insect, fungi” (*Primer I*: 67). In fact, Pinchot held that fire and bark beetles, not logging, were the two greatest problems facing American forests (*Breaking* 176). Muir defends such apparent natural destruction by placing it in a larger perspective and deeming it evidence of on-going creation, from pure to purer, lovely to lovelier. Pinchot can only see such destruction as waste because fires, floods, and insect infestations deprive humans of the use of the forest, and a forest’s only value, of course, lies in its usefulness. Muir could avow that “no Sierra landscape that I have seen holds anything truly dead or dull, or any trace of what in manufactories is called rubbish or waste; everything is perfectly clean and pure and full of divine lessons” (*First Summer* 157). Pinchot believed that forests left to their own devices were untidy and inefficient—they needed the trained forester to tend them and maximize their value.

In the public mind, at least, the Forest Service’s raison d’être in this century has been the prevention and fighting of forest fires, and this role clearly illustrates (and complicates) Pinchot’s wilderness values. Looking back at mid-century, Pinchot could “recall very well indeed how, in the early days of forest fires, they were considered simply and solely as acts of God, against which any opposition was hopeless and any attempt to control them not merely hopeless but childish. It was assumed that they came in the natural order of things, as inevitably as the seasons or the rising and setting of the
sun.” In 1947 he could say with assurance and a sense of accomplishment that “to-day we understand that forest fires are wholly within the control of men” (Fight 45). If he had lived another forty years, his confidence and pride would have been severely shaken.

By the 1980s, huge forest fires had become an almost annual summer event in the American west. Decades of “controlling” fires combined with several years of drought (a “natural” phenomenon in the west, of course) had led to conditions in which “mega-fires,” unlike any ever recorded before, were breaking out and raging uncontrollably. By the 1990s, even the Forest Service was admitting that fire was far from being within human control and that fire management plans had only exacerbated the problem. But at the turn of the century, Pinchot believed that the trained professional’s ability to maximize efficiency and eliminate waste could be applied to a host of human and natural problems and the world could be re-made into a better place.

The Gospel of Conservation

On a late February afternoon in 1907, while taking a therapeutic horseback ride just outside of Washington D.C., Gifford Pinchot had an epiphany. After having gained control of the Forest Service a few years earlier (a story I recount below), Pinchot had been perplexed and frustrated by the tangle of federal bureaucracies concerned with the nations’ natural resources. In gaining the role of Chief Forester, Pinchot had acquired a mess “which could be cured only be realizing that these unrelated and overlapping bureaus were all tied up together, like the people in a town” (Breaking 320). While riding his horse, Pinchot struck upon the unifying idea he needed:
Suddenly the idea flashed through my head that there was unity in this complication—that the relation of one resource to another was not the end of the story. Here were no longer a lot of different, independent, and often antagonistic questions, each on its own separate little island, as we had been in the habit of thinking. In place of them here was one single question with many parts. Seen in this new light, all these separate questions fitted into and made up the one great problem of the use of the earth for the good of man (322).

Pinchot recognized that in order to gain the public and political support needed to untangle the bureaucratic mess, he needed a powerfully persuasive theme; this he found in “the one great problem” of Conservation: “The Conservation of natural resources is the key to the future. It is the key to the safety and prosperity of the American people, and all the people of the world, for all time to come” (Breaking 324). Such grand claims would continue to mark the language of Conservation.

In some ways, this “new light” Pinchot had unveiled just seems like an obvious and easy extension of his utilitarian forestry ideas to other natural resources, but this more inclusive application of the concept would appeal to millions of Americans in ways his ideas about forestry never had. Pinchot himself described his insight as almost approaching religious revelation: “To me it was a good deal like coming out of a dark tunnel. I had been seeing one spot of light ahead. Here, all of a sudden, was a whole landscape. It was like lifting the curtain on a great new stage” (323). From a rhetorical perspective, the persuasive appeal of Pinchot’s idea might have had more to do with simplification than unification. He offered Conservation as an uncomplicated solution to a singular problem: “one gigantic single problem that must be solved if the generations,
as they came and went, were to live civilized, happy useful lives in the lands which the Lord their God had given them” (323). The problem, of course, was inefficiency, and Conservation was offered as the cure-all.

After his epiphany, Pinchot quickly went to work in selling his idea to the public. His original vision for Conservation was elementary, and typically preached as a three point sermon: 1) natural resources must be used and renewed, not simply protected or preserved. 2) The federal government should be granted increased control in order to insure Point One and to guarantee that access to resources would be granted according to common interest and fair use. 3) The people’s rights must not be infringed by selfish corporations and monopolies. Pinchot had an ally in W. J. McGee who became the leading prophet, after Pinchot, of Conservation. Like Pinchot, McGee proclaimed “a new world which conscious purpose, science, and human reason could create out of the chaos of a laissez-faire economy where short-run individual interest provided no thought for the morrow” (Hays 124).

While introducing his vision, Pinchot went to great lengths to distance Conservation from Preservation: “The first thing to say about Conservation is that it stands for development. There has been a fundamental misconception that Conservation meant nothing but the husbanding of resources for future generations. There could be no more serious mistake” (National 72). Pinchot is strident concerning the first point in his sermon: “The first principle of conservation is development, the use of the natural resources now existing on this continent for the benefit of the people who live here now” (National 72). Pinchot was concerned that in the public’s mind sustainability might be
somehow confused with Preservation and warns against this confusion: "Conservation does mean provision for the future, but it means also and first of all the recognition of the right of the present generation to the fullest necessary use of all the resources with which this country is so abundantly blessed. Conservation demands the welfare of this generation first, and afterward the welfare of the generations to follow" (Fight 42).

An aspect of Conservation implied in the second point of his sermon, that Pinchot, understandably, did not call public attention to, was that Conservation would depend on a standing army of federal technocrats. Pinchot, as is illustrated below, highlighted the democratic and patriotic aspects of Conservation in his appeals to the public, but, as Samuel Hays points out, "Conservation was, above all, a scientific movement, and its role in history arises from the implications of science and technology in modern society. Conservationists envisaged, even though they did not realize their aims, a political system guided by the idea of efficiency and dominated by the technicians who could best determine how to achieve it" (2-3). The inherent professionalism in Conservation was either not recognized by or not disturbing to the public of the time, for the cause was embraced with an astounding fervor.

Part of Conservation's success was that its public message was cut from the same cloth as Progressivism, which was already extremely popular with vast numbers of Americans. According to at least one scholar, Pinchot's "insight" was hardly original—it was simply an application to natural resources of the reformist energies already awakened by Progressivism (Worster 262). Progressivism had set its sights on cleaning up politics, regulating business corporations, and purifying the nation's morals. The
conservation of natural resources could be seen as just one of many public improvement projects of the time. It did not seem out of place among calls for government regulation of the economy; tariff reduction; Prohibition; women’s suffrage; municipal reform; the improvement of working conditions; child labor; housing and public health; or the treatment of poverty, vice, and crime (Jones 368).

It did not take long before Pinchot realized that within this reformist climate, Conservation’s gospel of efficiency could be applied to issues far removed from the wise use of natural resources. By 1908, Pinchot could announce that he and other Conservationists “are coming to see the logical and inevitable outcome that these principles, which arose in forestry and have their bloom in the conservation of natural resources, will have their fruit in the increase and promotion of national efficiency along other lines of national life” (Fight 50). Hays notes that, “the term ‘Conservation’ proved to be highly elastic. After the summer of 1908 its meaning expanded to include almost every movement of the day, and a wide variety of reformers flocked into conservation organizations” (Hays 176). Pinchot saw his supporters swell through this expansion, but he also saw his message diluted. At the National Conservation Congress in August 1909, delegates delivered speeches on the conservation of peace and friendship among nations, the conservation of children’s lives through the elimination of child labor, and the conservation of civic beauty (Hays 176).

One delegate proclaimed the conservation of gender roles: “But we also join hands in producing our greatest crop, our principal product, manly men and womanly women, and that is conservation (National 54). The transcript notes that this declaration
was received with sustained applause. A delegate from Washington vaunted that his state “has passed a law to conserve the morals and health of the boys of the State by making it a misdemeanor to have the makings of a cigarette in their possession.” And, that “the Legislature has also passed a law, known as the Local Option Law, which gives each community the right to protect its homes against the invasion of that foe to humanity, the modern saloon (National 65). A western university president put in a plug for higher education by noting that “our greatest natural resource, after all is said and done, is the brains of our people” (National 87). And the Hon. A. F. Knudsen of Hawaii called for the conservation of the race: “So let us hold up the banner of racial conservation together with that of material conservation, that we may have a fit manhood to continue and maintain the wonderful race and splendid patrimony we are now building. Let us therefore be jealous as to who shall be born an American citizen. Let conservation herald a new civilization and a new race” (National 62)

Pinchot held that “there is, in fact, no interest of the people to which the principles of conservation do not apply” (Fight 49) and McGee agreed that “Conservation covers the earth and the fullness thereof for the infinite good” (National 98). The ranks of Conservation were swollen by these absurd extensions of the idea, and this increase in those identifying as Conservationists is important, given the role of that community in the Hetch Hetchy debate. Although very little of this bombast was retained within the idea of Conservation past the third decade of the century, it reflected a very real impulse of this era, an impulse Donald Worster describes as an “unusually fierce determination to make the civilizing process stick good and tight, once and for all.

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Never before had this ideal seemed so important to obtain. In fact, the defining demand of the times may have been the need for an aggressive, resolute, even violent, force of culture to harness and subdue the nature that Darwin, among others, found so menacing” (170). This hope and determination is expressed by the editor of an engineering journal, whom Kenneth Burke would have said was rotten with perfection: “The Millennium will have been reached when humanity shall have learned to eliminate all useless waste. When humanity shall have learned to apply the common sense and scientific rules of efficiency to the care of the body and mind and the labors of body and mind, then indeed will we be nearing the condition of perfect” (Hays 125).

This hope among Pinchot and other Conservationists that their gospel would lead to a millennial humanist perfection reveals the radical anthropocentrism of Conservation. Neil Evernden offers this choice: “We may regard humanity as a part of nature and subject to absolute moral standards inherent therein, or as a creature able to overcome the remnants of nature within and build a better, supra-natural future for itself” (22); clearly, Conservationists were striving for the latter goal. In this light, Conservationists, far from preserving nature, were trying to humanize it. While Muir wanted to keep humans out of the private Garden (unless they were properly shriven pilgrims), Pinchot had no use for privacy at all. Proper gardens were orderly, thoroughly domesticated, and busy with human activity. Pinchot, more than anything, wanted to use the Forest Service to create a model Garden out of the public domain.
Public Gardens

Before looking at how Pinchot promoted the working Garden and invited Americans to labor in it under his professional guidance, I turn to a brief account of how and why American public lands were so important at the time and how Pinchot positioned himself as the authority on their use. The entire land mass of the continental United States, excluding the thirteen original colonies and Texas, were once public land. In principle, public land is owned, in common, by all citizens of the United States. By the time westward expansion was finished, this public domain amounted to almost two billion acres (*Breaking* 78). Through a variety of early nineteenth century land laws, this land was available for private appropriation, both for use and for conversion to private ownership, but administration and enforcement of the laws was notoriously ineffective and often corrupt. By mid-century, recognition of this incompetence and graft, combined with massive immigration into the lands of the public domain, led to such legislation as the Homestead Act (1862), the Mineral Land Act (1866), the Desert Land Act (1877), and the Timber and Stone Act (1878). All of these land laws were intended to open up lands for affordable purchase to individual, small farmers for settlement and “improvement.” Such legislation was a conscious attempt to realize Jefferson’s vision of a land of yeoman farmer-citizens.

An applicant for a land grant had to swear that that he or she had not bought the land for another party and that title would remain in his or her possession. Congress would not fund agents to enforce the law, however, so land theft was rampant in the West. Historians delight in recounting the inventive and colorful deceptions resorted to

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by those whose conscience would not allow them to commit outright theft,¹¹ but the abuse was very real. If we think only of forest land, such corruption allowed timber to pass from the hands of individual citizens and into the hands of corporations and monopolies for unrestricted exploitation. Other mining and timber companies did not even bother, however deceptively, to get ownership of the land. They simply stole millions of feet of publicly owned timber because no one was there to stop them.

By the 1870’s a small group of reformers, among them John Muir, began calling for something to be done about the abuse of public forests. A federal Forestry Division was formed in 1876 to study and oversee the national forests, but little was accomplished until 1891, when an Amendment to the repeal of the Timber and Stone Act authorized the creation of the Forest Reserves out of which would eventually emerge the Forest Service, but that is anticipating. The Forest Reserve system simply took millions of acres of public forest and made them off limits to all development or use. Technically, it was not even legal for a citizen to step foot into these reserves (86). When Pinchot returned from Europe in 1890, he recognized that these reserves, totaling 17,564,800 acres by the mid-1890’s, could form the basis for a national system of scientific forestry. He devoted himself to convincing Washington and the public that these lands, while rightfully being protected from exploitation, were being wasted through their non-use. In 1896, Pinchot pushed through Presidential approval of the Forest Commission, whose purpose would be to visit, study, and report back to the President on the condition and future of the Reserves. It was on this Commission’s survey of the western Reserves that Pinchot met
Muir. With Pinchot as its driving force, the Commission's recommendations for the
Reserves are not surprising. The Commission Report of May 1, 1897 declared:

These great bodies of reserved lands cannot be withdrawn from
occupation and use. They must be made to perform their part in the
economy of the nation. Unless the reserved lands of the public domain
are made to contribute to the welfare and prosperity of the country, they
should be thrown open to settlement and the whole system of reserved
forests abandoned. (*Breaking 120*)

On the Commission’s advice, Grover Cleveland added thirteen new Reserves,
totaling an estimated 21,279,840 acres, bringing the total Reserve system up to almost
40,000,000 acres. Pinchot succeed brilliantly in more than doubling the Reserve system;
now he had to change the way the federal government and the public thought about the
Reserves. At the time, opinion was largely split between Preservationists, such as Muir,
who were satisfied with the hands-off policy and only wanted more effective protection,
including military patrols (*National Parks I: 87*), and a largely western faction of both
corporate interests and individuals who resented any federal interference in the use of
western forests. This faction revolted at the doubling of the Reserves, and Pinchot
understood their indignation; he began a public relations program to get out the word that
the newly conceived Reserves, far from being protected from use, would be utilized to
the fullest efficient extent.

After a number of contentious floor fights in Congress, Pinchot and his allies
pushed through the Pettigrew Amendment to the Sundry Civil Act of June 4, 1897, later
known as the Forest Management Act. This piece of legislation did two important things,
according to Pinchot, it opened the Reserves to use and it made possible the initiation of a sound and efficient administration of the forests. The legislation, in effect, mandated that the Reserves be used. Pinchot, however, still had one major obstacle in his path to becoming the overseer of the public forests. At this time, the Reserves were under the control of the Department of the Interior, a department, according to Pinchot, with “a tradition of political toadeating and executive incompetence” (116). Much of Pinchot’s energies from 1897 to 1905 would be devoted to having himself appointed Chief Forester and moving oversight of forests out of the Department of the Interior and into the Department of Agriculture. While this effort was largely political (Pinchot was not well-liked by the “toadeaters”), it was also a reflection of Pinchot’s belief that forestry was an agricultural concern, while the Department of the Interior was more properly concerned with the preservation of monuments, parks and natural curiosities.

By the time Pinchot attained the Transfer Act of 1905, which placed forestry in Department of Agriculture, he had achieved much else besides. He was Chief Forester of all the nation’s public forests, by then totaling 86,000,000 acres; he had the Forest Reserves redesignated as National Forests; he controlled the budget of a congressional appropriation that had risen from $28,520 in 1903 to $439,873 in 1905; he supervised 821 Service employees, including 153 professional foresters (291); and he enjoyed the close friendship of a dynamic President, Theodore Roosevelt, who vigorously supported his forest policies.13 The grassroots and congressional support that made these political successes possible was largely achieved by Pinchot’s connecting the myth of the Garden with American’s ideals of national purpose and democracy. Pinchot offered a version of
the Garden that not only allowed his fellow citizens to work it, but insisted that it was their patriotic duty to do so. He did this by linking the conservationist *mythos* of the Garden to American ideals of democracy.

**Democratic Conservation**

In his public discourse, Pinchot repeatedly stressed the democratic nature of Conservation: “Conservation is the most democratic movement this country has known for a generation... and I believe it stands nearer to the desires, aspirations, and purposes of the average man than any other policy now before the American people” (*Fight* 82). Pinchot argued that “Equality of opportunity is the real object of our laws and institutions” (*Fight* 26) and that this equality and opportunity must be extended to the use of natural resources. While there is no reason to doubt Pinchot’s sincerity, it is also true that he needed the support of individual forest users if he was to fight the corporate monopolies: “Forestry cannot succeed unless the people who live in and near the forest are for it and not against it” (*Breaking* 17).

While Pinchot thought his experience on the Biltmore Estate helped him “to prove what America did not yet understand, that trees could be cut and the forest preserved at one and the same time” (*Breaking* 49), he was ultimately dissatisfied with his position there, and part of his dissatisfaction was due to the fact that Biltmore was a glaring example of *undemocratic* Conservation. The estate was, in essence, nothing more than a vast, private game reserve and retreat for a conspicuously wealthy family. Pinchot worried that the estate and the European-style castle at its center “did not
belong.” that it was out of place “among the one-room cabins of the Appalachian mountaineers” (Breaking 48). Pinchot was interested in the Public Gardens, not this luxurious private garden.

As has already been noted, one plank in Pinchot’s tripartite Conservation platform was the fight against monopolies and their use of the land. While his primary objection to monopolies was that they were so powerful that they could resist effective public control, he always made a point of connecting his damnation of the monopolies and “special interests” to the uplifting of the “little man,” and he repeatedly speaks of “the injustice of concentrated wealth,” and describes the absorption of resources into the hands of the privileged few as a “moral wrong” (Fight 82). Pinchot made effective appeals to the support of the working and middle classes by constructing the issue as an Us-Them struggle: “I see no reason why we should deliberately keep on helping to fasten the handcuffs of corporate control upon ourselves for all time merely because the few men who would profit by it most have heretofore had the power to compel it” (Fight 84). A large measure of Pinchot’s rhetorical success lay in his effectively correlating Conservation to the democratic ideals held so deeply by his audience and convincing them that they must do something to keep the “common heritage of land fit for and intended for American homes [from] falling, in huge quantities, into the crooked, mercenary, and speculative hands of companies, corporations, and monopolies” (Breaking 82). And, Pinchot was not above invoking the specter of an Un-American way of life: “Unless the American homestead system of small free-holders is to be so replaced by a foreign system of tenancy, there are few things of more importance to the West than
to see to it that the public lands pass directly into the hands of the actual settler instead of into the hands of the man who, if he can, will force the settler to pay him the unearned profit of the land speculator, or will hold him in economic and political dependence as a tenant” (Fight 13-14).

In place of this looming feudalism, Pinchot promises a land of Jeffersonian freeholders working the Garden in the common interest. In language taken directly from Jefferson, Pinchot asserts that “The most valuable citizen of this or any other country is the man who owns the land from which he makes his living. No other man has such a stake in the country. No other man lends such steadiness and stability to our national life” (Fight 21). Pinchot insists that the small, independent farmer needs Conservation and Conservation needs him. Conservation will thrive, according to Pinchot, only with the support of the independent farmers who offer “sanity, simplicity and directness” to the movement (Fight 23), while Conservation promises not only “to get better crops, not merely to dispose of crops better, but in the last analysis to have happier and richer lives of men and women on the farm” (Fight 37-8). We have no way of ascertaining how effective this appeal to agrarian virtue was for farmers themselves, but in a swiftly urbanizing nation in which pastoral simplicity was becoming more and more idealized by the citified masses, the connection struck a chord.

Pinchot further increases the democratic inclusiveness of Conservation by making direct appeals to the nation’s women: “The success of the conservation movement in the United States depends in the end on the understanding the women have of it. No forward step in this whole campaign has been more deeply appreciated or more welcomed than
that which the National Society of the Daughters of the American Revolution and other
organizations of women have taken in appointing conservation committees” (Fight
101). Pinchot does not just appeal to women in the abstract; he calls attention to
specific Conservation work that had already been done by women as examples of what
they could achieve:

Few people realize what women have already done for conservation, and
what they may do. Some of the earliest effective forest work that was done
in the United States, work which laid the lines that have been followed
since, was that of the Pennsylvania Forestry Association, begun and carried
through first of all by ladies in Philadelphia. One of the bravest, most
intelligent and most effective fights for forestry that I have known of was
that of the women of Minnesota for the Minnesota National Forest. It was
a superb success, and we have that forest to-day. I have known of no case
of persistent agitation under discouragement finer in a good many ways
than the fight that the women of California have made to save the great
grove of Calaveras big trees. As a result the Government has taken the
possession of that forest and will preserve it for all future generations.
Time and again, then, the women have made it perfectly clear what they
can do in this work. (Fight, 106)

In addition to praising this public activism, Pinchot, building upon the received wisdom
of the time that the instillation of morals and values was fully within women’s domestic
sphere, urges that “Women alone can bring to the school children the idea of the
wickedness of national waste and the value of public saving. The issue is a moral one;
and women are the first teachers of right and wrong” (Breaking, 106). While we might
wince at the gendered assumptions inhering in such a view, Pinchot goes to great lengths
to assure women that they are very valuable to the Conservation movement: “And almost
without exception it is the mother who plants patriotism in the mind of the child. It is her
duty. The growth of patriotism is first of all in the hands of the women of any nation. In the last analysis it is the mothers of a nation who direct that nation's destiny” (Fight 102). This role is venerable because Pinchot not only links Conservation to democratic ideals but to the nation's sense of patriotic duty as well.

The United States, at this time, was entering its first phase of imperialist intervention and conquest. The movement from a deliberately and proudly isolationist nation, focused on its own internal expansion and improvement, to a nation engaged in global military-colonial ventures was accompanied by much flag-waving and patriotic oratory. Pinchot taps into this resurgent jingoism. In his autobiography, he explains that although Europe had many trained foresters and the U.S. had few, other than himself, he resisted staffing the new Forest Service with Europeans because “What we wanted was American foresters trained by Americans in American ways for the work ahead in American forests” (Breaking 152). Being the consummate politician that he was, Pinchot, while warning Americans of the dangers facing their way of life, always accompanied his dire predictions with unabashed boosterism: “The most prosperous nation of to-day is the United States. Our unexampled health and well-being are directly due to the superb natural resources of our country, and to the use which has been made of them by our citizens, both in the present and in the past” (Fight 3).

In fact, Pinchot’s expressed pride in his country, while rhetorically sophisticated, leads him into some awkward constructions of the nation’s history. Although he laments the destruction of the continent’s natural resources, he also understands that the United States had become a global power because of that very destruction. While warning his
audience that they have to change their ways, he also assures them that their past rapaciousness should not be understood as shameful:

No man may rightly fail to take a great pride in what has been accomplished by means of the destruction of our natural resources so far as it has gone. Out of this attack on what nature has given we have won a kind of prosperity and a kind of civilization and a kind of man that are new in the world. We have gained out of the vast destruction of our natural resources a degree of vigor and power and efficiency of which every man of us ought to be proud. (*Fight 75*).

Pinchot creates for himself the difficult task of both praising the results of unchecked exploitation in the past and condemning such ravenous behavior for the present and future, for “those who come after us will have to pay the price of misery, degradation, and failure for the progress and prosperity of our day” (*Fight 4*). Pinchot’s Conservation message was persuasive, in large part, because he tied the success of Conservation to the success of the nation and he insists that Conservation is a patriotic duty: “When the natural resources of any nation become exhausted, disaster and decay in every department of national life follow as a matter of course. Therefore the conservation of natural resources is the basis, and the only permanent basis, of national success” (*Fight, 4*). Pinchot envisions and promotes an American century, perhaps even an American millennium, but only if Conservation is accepted and practiced: “We shall reach a population of two hundred millions in the very near future, as time is counted in the lives of nations, and there is nothing more certain than that this country of ours will some day support double or triple or five times that number of prosperous people if only
we can bring ourselves so to handle our natural resources in the present as not to lay an embargo on the prosperous growth of the future” (Fight 5).

Pinchot goes so far as to compare the unregulated exploitation of resources to the American Revolution and the Civil War in terms of national urgency: “In the third great crisis of our history, which has now come squarely upon us, the special interest and the thoughtless citizens seem to have united together to deprive the Nation of the great natural resources without which it cannot endure. This is the pressing danger now, and it is not the least to which our National life has been exposed” (Fight 123). By constructing the issue in the language of national crisis, Pinchot can present Conservation as a moral and patriotic duty. He argues that Conservation is a moral issue because it involves the privileges and the responsibilities of the American people, “their rights to prosperity and happiness, and their duties to themselves, to their descendants, and to the whole future progress and welfare of this Nation” (Fight 88). Pinchot insists that Conservation is not just of material, economic concern:

Conservation is not merely a question of business, but a question of a vastly higher duty. In dealing with our natural resources we have come to a place at last where every consideration of patriotism, every consideration of love of country, of gratitude for things that the land and the institutions of this Nation have given us, call upon us for a return. If we owe anything to the United States, if this country has been good to us, if it has given us our prosperity, our education, and our chance of happiness, then there is a duty resting upon us (Fight 78)

Part of Pinchot’s rhetorical success was that, unlike Muir’s message of Preservation, Conservation invoked an audience that had real agency in the issue. Where
Preservation preached a philosophy of non-action, "leaving it alone," Conservation appealed to individuals as having a duty to act. "Duty," for Pinchot, is as important a concept as "efficiency" or "use": "The care of the forests is the duty of the nation" (Breaking 35). Conservation "holds that the people have not only the right, but the duty to control the use of the natural resources, which are the great sources of prosperity" (Fight 82).

If the American people assume their moral and patriotic duties, the country can be saved, but if they shirk this responsibility, the nation faces imminent ruin, and Pinchot reminds his proud fellow citizens that other great nation's have declined and fallen and that Conservation "is the only form of insurance that will certainly protect us against the disasters that lack of foresight has in the past repeatedly brought down on nations since passed away" (Fight 20). If Conservation prevails, an American utopia will emerge: "If we succeed, there will exist upon this continent a sane, strong people, living through the centuries in a land subdued and controlled for the service of the people, its rightful masters, owned by the many and not by the few" (Fight 27). Pinchot makes it clear that a good American's duty is not to protect the remnants of an Edenic Garden, but to build a heaven on earth and lead the less righteous nations into it: "Among the first duties of every man is to help in bringing the Kingdom of God on earth. The greatest human power for good, the most efficient earthly tool for the future uplifting of the nations, is without question the United States" (Fight 95).
Preaching the Gospel

While the preceding discussion of Pinchot's rhetoric has detailed some of his discursive approaches to Conservation, in this closing section of the chapter, I look at some of the specific strategies Pinchot employed to reach his audience and spread his gospel. It is important, first, to emphasize just how effective Pinchot's efforts were from 1906-1914. It is crucial to the discussion of Hetch Hetchy in the following chapter to keep in mind that while John Muir is much more widely known and read than Gifford Pinchot is today, Pinchot's Conservation message prevailed in the first two decades of this century and is still highly influential. Conservation, which was an unheard of concept in 1905, was, by 1910, an enormous national movement with tens of thousands of active supporters. I have discussed above some of the reasons why Conservation appealed to so many Americans, I now address how Pinchot spread his message.

Pinchot's borrowing of the methods of mass advertising which had emerged in the decades after the Civil War account for much of his success in disseminating his message. Pinchot made extensive use of mailing lists, and by 1909 the Forest Service had built up a mailing list of 781,000 people to whom circulars and letters on forestry and conservation were regularly sent. This list included 16,000 engineers, 56,000 lumbermen, 22,000 journalists, 321,000 farmers, and 111,900 educators. (McGeary 88) In addition to these mass mailings, Pinchot also developed some of the techniques of modern lobbying. He and other Forest Service staffers would write unsigned, pro-Conservation articles and then send them to newspapers and magazines who used the canned material extensively (McGeary 51). Pinchot and his colleagues in the Service
would also write articles, and even legislation, that would then be provided to friendly (or obligated) Representatives and Senators who would introduce the materials in Congress as their own.

Pinchot also understood the power of a media event. As he puts it: “The most effective way to get your cause before the public is to do something the papers will have to tell about” (Breaking 329). Pinchot’s crowning achievement in staging a spectacle was the August 1908 Conference on the Conservation of Natural Resources in Washington D.C., widely known as the Governor’s Conference. This conference was a first in attempting to bring together all the chief executives of the states; thirty-four of the forty-six governors attended and the others sent high-ranking representatives (McGeary 96). In addition to this impressive assembly, Pinchot also invited the 60th Congress, which was currently in session, the Supreme Court Justices, the President, and his entire Cabinet. Also on hand, and given the opportunity to speak, were William Jennings Bryan, Andrew Carnegie, and former President, Grover Cleveland (Breaking..., 346). John Muir was blatantly not invited. It is important to note not only how unprecedented in magnitude this spectacle was, but how thoroughly staged it was. In his memoirs, Pinchot reveals that special guests such as Carnegie and Bryan “were anxious for help in preparing their speeches... We were equally anxious that they should say what needed to be said” so Pinchot and McGee wrote most of the speeches presented at the Conference (Breaking 346).

Pinchot was exultant about the conference and believed that it, more than any other effort, sold Conservation to the public: “The policy of conservation was so well and
so wisely presented that it was instantly and universally accepted and approved by the people of the United States” (Breaking 353). Thirty years afterwards, Pinchot still held that “it may well be regarded by future historians as a turning point in human history” (Breaking 352). This media event was followed by an even more ambitious conference, the continent-wide North American Conservation Conference which met in February of 1909. Pinchot even had plans for a World Conservation Conference but the plan was killed by President Taft (Breaking 367). Through such manipulations of the media, conservation became the most talked about subject in America (McGeary 98).

While Pinchot’s message of conservationism was embraced by millions of Americans, he was astonished by the massive resistance to his conservationist gospel, a resistance most clearly evidenced by the Hetch Hetchy controversy. That there even was a controversy and debate over the proposed damming of a wild river was deeply disturbing to Pinchot and challenged his belief in the inevitability of a scientific, managerial utopia embraced by all good citizens. In the following chapter, I look at how the conflicting mythoi of the Conservationists and Preservationists were used and misused in the Hetch Hetchy debate.

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1 Although touring and living in Europe extensively as a young man, Pinchot did not travel west of the Alleghenies until 1892, at which time he was 27 years old and already well embarked upon his career as a forester (McGeary 22).
In addition to supporting Gifford’s career, James Pinchot endowed $300,000 for the creation and maintenance of the Yale Forestry School—the first forestry school in the United States.

According to Pinchot, “The Use Book marked the beginning of sound, clean, and effective Government forest administration in America” (Breaking 265).

Much of the land Pinchot managed at Biltmore is now part of the Pisgah National Forest.

This business ethic had one result apparently unintended and unforeseen by Pinchot who, as is illustrated below, voiced strong support for the family business and individual entrepreneur: Big business, which is able to absorb the initial costs of conservation practices for a future profit, would increasingly dominate the National Forests throughout the twentieth century. Today, the Forest Service, according to its critics, is no more than a tax-payer supported field division of such huge timber corporations as Boise Cascade, Georgia Pacific, and Weyerhaeuser.

The conservationists’ connection between forests and gardens is made explicit in the title of the leading forestry journal at the turn of the century, Garden and Forest, William A. Stiles, ed.

At times, too, Pinchot seems to share Muir’s elitism and disdain for those with less sophisticated aesthetic sensibilities. Pinchot first visited the Grand Canyon with an office-boy working for an Arizona timber company: “Awe struck and silent, I strove to grasp the vastness and the beauty of the greatest sight this world has to offer. Meanwhile Doran stood beside me and kept repeating ‘My, ain’t it pretty’ I wanted to throw him in” (Breaking 42).

As was his habit, Muir got them both in trouble by insisting that they stay out all night even though the rest of their party expected them back by dark.

As Pinchot put it: “there were three separate Government organizations which dealt with mineral resources, four or five concerned with streams, half a dozen with authority over forests, and a dozen or so with supervision over wildlife, soils, soil erosion, and other questions of the land” (Breaking 320).

Facts and figures in this section, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from Breaking New Ground, pp. 80-197.

For instance, homestead claims required that dwellings of at least 14x16 be located on the land claimed, but did not specify inches or feet, so many a doll house was placed on
unimproved land. If irrigation was required, a farmer might, with a few spadefuls of
turned earth, "dig a ditch", pour a can of water in, and claim the land had been improved
through irrigation (Breaking 82).

12 I should emphasize that John Muir, though accompanying the Commission through
much of its investigation, was not an official member and did not contribute to or
endorse its report.

13 He had also achieved a lucrative and controversial financial arrangement for the Forest
Service that would swell its coffers far beyond its sizeable congressional appropriation.
According to the Transfer Act of 1905: Section 5, all revenues generated from forest
permits and users fees would remain within the Service—revenue, then was directly tied
to use (Breaking 258).

14 Of course, Pinchot never called attention to his own privileged status and background
of wealth.

15 Pinchot’s mother chaired the DAR conservation committee (McGeary 7).

16 It is more than a little ironic that interpretive centers and kiosks in the National Forests
today are saturated with quotes from John Muir, while Pinchot, the creator of the Forest
System, is all but invisible.

17 Such blanket coverage was made possible by the extension of Rural Free Delivery in
the first decade of the century (Boorstin 118-25).
Chapter 4:

To Flood a Temple: The Damming of Hetch Hetchy

“He turneth the wilderness into a standing water, and dry ground into water-springs.”

(Psalms 107: 35)

Some thirty miles north of the Yosemite Valley, the Tuolumne River cuts through steep and waterfall laced walls, running west beneath jutting towers of glaciated granite on toward its confluence with the Sacramento River. After a steep descent from the high Sierra snowfields¹ and before its meandering course through the dusty foothills, the Tuolumne once rushed through a broad, meadow and bog covered valley known as Hetch Hetchy. For the last seventy years, the Tuolumne’s run to the Pacific has been constricted and controlled by a massive concrete dam plugging the river’s natural outlet from the valley. Until the turn of the century, few Americans had ever even heard of Hetch Hetchy and far less had actually seen it. By 1910, however, the proposed damming of Hetch Hetchy by the city of San Francisco was frequently debated in magazines, newspapers, and legislative halls throughout the country. These debates mark the first moment in U.S. history in which an actual wilderness and its value was publicly and
widely discussed. Hetch Hetchy has remained, beyond its death by drowning, a powerful symbol and rallying point for the wilderness movement and its advocates.

In this chapter, I analyze the debates generated from 1906 to 1913 concerning Hetch Hetchy’s fate, with two specific purposes in mind: 1) I illustrate how *mythos*, especially that of the Garden-Temple, shaped the arguments in the debate, and show how *mythos* shaped the perceptions and representations of this rhetorical situation; 2) I argue that the Preservationist’s rhetoric was ultimately ineffective because of an inability and/or reluctance to ground their arguments in the mythic orientations that actually support the preservationist position; instead, they ineffectually attempted to argue within the conservationist *mythos* of utility. In order to situate the Hetch Hetchy debate more fully in its historical and social context, I begin this chapter by relating the story of San Francisco’s struggle to dam Hetch Hetchy and the Preservationists’ fight to save it.

**The Thirst of a City**

By the late nineteenth century, San Francisco was in the uncomfortable position of being a desperately thirsty metropolis surrounded on three sides by water. In an era long before desalinization was a reasonable option, San Francisco, situated on a semi-arid peninsula, had to look abroad for its fresh water. The peninsula is naturally so arid that virtually no trees were on it when Mexican villagers first colonized the area in the Eighteenth Century (Long 20). The need for potable water and the opportunities to exploit that need for profit, became apparent by the 1840’s, when individual water-
peddlers conducted retail business with parched prospectors in the streets. These individual entrepreneurs soon consolidated into several competing companies, and by the 1870's only one of these companies remained, the Spring Valley Water Company. This company was not only the exclusive supplier of water to San Francisco, but it had bought up the entire watershed surrounding the city in order to block out any future competitors. With this monopoly in place, the company began raising its rates and a rancorous battle developed between the city and its privately held water utility.

As early as the mid-1870's, the city began searching for its own municipally owned water supply. Spring Water's mercenary foresight in buying up the surrounding lands and water rights meant that San Francisco had to look far afield for its own supply, and these early attempts, consequently, did not get very far. In 1900, however, progressives agitated for a new city charter that required the City of San Francisco to possess and manage its own water supply. With this impetus, the city made a renewed effort to find fresh water, and, after surveying several options, decided on the Hetch Hetchy Valley as offering the ideal site for a reliable supply of pure water. In 1901, Democratic Mayor James Phelan entered a claim on the valley floor under his own name, not that of the city; this bit of subterfuge, which kept Preservationists from even realizing that the city had its eye on the valley, was the first of many such deceptions in the Hetch Hetchy story.

The federal Right of Way Act of 1901, which preservationists had opposed, allowed Phelan to enter this claim on Hetch Hetchy, but the city's ambitions were frustrated by Secretary of the Interior, Ethan Allen Hitchcock, who refused, in 1903, the
city's permit to build a dam in the valley. With this denial, the fundamental weakness in the city's plans became apparent. The valley was ideal for the city in that its geological features (a broad level floor, high steep sides, and a narrow, relatively easily plugged outlet) were perfect, its location (far from developing cities—but not too far from San Francisco, with clean and disease-free snow fields surrounding it) was ideal, and, most importantly, it was under no previous private ownership; there was, however, one major problem with the site which would arouse a fierce local and national opposition to San Francisco's plans: the Hetch Hetchy Valley was inside a National Park.

The interesting and convoluted history of Yosemite National Park has generated numerous books and articles, here I will only attempt to provide a brief sketch of its evolution into a national park before returning to the story of San Francisco and Hetch Hetchy. In 1864 the floor of Yosemite Valley (only about ten square miles) was granted by Congress to California; it was accepted by the state in 1866 and became the first State Park in the nation (Jones 6). In 1890, through the lobbying of John Muir, Robert Underwood Johnson, other preservationists and the attorneys retained by the Southern Pacific Railroad, Congress dedicated 1, 512 square miles surrounding the valley (but not Yosemite valley itself) as the nation's second national park (Jones 45). In 1893, again through the lobbying of Muir and other preservationists, over 2,000 additional square miles surrounding the park were designated by Congress as Forest Reserves. In 1905, Congress redrew the park map; 542 square miles were lost and 113 were added. In 1906, the persistent lobbying of the Sierra Club paid off when the State of California
finally ceded the valley floor of Yosemite to the federal government and it became a part of the National Park surrounding it.

By this time, Muir and the Sierra Club felt confident that Yosemite, Muir's Holy of Holies, which he first entered forty years earlier, was safe from encroachment. Not only had Congress finally provided a complete and definite park outline, but Mayor Phelan's application to dam Hetch Hetchy had been roundly denied by Secretary of the Interior Hitchcock, who reconfirmed the inviolate nature of the park's land and scenery. While working for recession of the valley floor to federal control and the settling of park boundaries, Muir and the Sierra Club, while wary of San Francisco's eye on Hetch Hetchy, did not take the threat all that seriously. At the park's establishment several years earlier, Muir wrote that Hetch Hetchy should be included in the park but "whether it is or not will not matter much since it lies in rugged rocky security as one of Nature's own reservations" (Jones 86).

 Ironically, this remoteness and inaccessibility were two of the features San Francisco found most enticing about the valley. After 1903, a change in administration and public outrage over corrupt city politics shifted attention away from San Francisco's mandated need for a publicly owned water system—the heat was off Hetch Hetchy. But the Great Earthquake of 1906 and the return of a Democratic administration in 1907 changed that. The cataclysmic fires following the earthquake and the lack of water to fight them gave the backers of the Hetch Hetchy plan, who returned to office the following year, a powerful, if illogical, argument. Although water was not available at many fires, this was due to the rupturing of almost all water lines and had nothing at all
to do with an inadequate reserve supply of water. In addition, short of raising the level of
the Pacific by a few hundred feet, no amount of water could have stopped the raging
infernos that erupted when the natural gas lines broke, with the water pipes running along
beside them. Regardless of the illogic, most San Franciscans, and many Americans
outside the city, accepted the disastrous fires as evidence of San Francisco’s need for
water at any cost.

One of San Francisco’s chief advocates of the Hetch Hetchy plan was Mardsen
Manson, a public works commissioner in the Phelan administration. In 1907, he went to
Washington as a private citizen and befriended two very important men: Gifford Pinchot
(who soon made public endorsements of the Hetch Hetchy plan) and James R. Garfield
(who would soon be appointed Secretary of the Interior). On May 11, 1908, Secretary
Garfield reversed the decision of his predecessor Secretary Hitchcock, and issued a
partial permit to the city to begin limited work on the planning and preparation of the
dam and reservoir site. It is important to note that Garfield’s decision was passed down
exactly two days before the opening of the Pinchot-organized White House Conference
on the Conservation of Natural Resources (discussed in the previous chapter) which
stressed the efficient use of natural resources for the betterment of humanity. As one
historian notes, “The Garfield permit was a perfect example of that theme” (Clements
190).

This permit caught the Sierra Club napping, or more accurately, camping. In
preparation for Garfield’s decision, San Francisco officials invited the Secretary to the
city for an “open” hearing, advertised at the last moment, while Muir and the Sierra Club
were on their annual summer outing in the mountains. Club members did not get the news that Garfield was in the city’s pocket until their return to the city (Fox 140).

Although getting a tardy start, the Club immediately sprang into passionate and intense action, producing pamphlets, writing editorials and articles (Muir even wrote a book, *The Yosemite*, which I discuss below), and alerting conservation groups such as the Appalachian Mountain Club, whose members could more effectively lobby in Washington.

The club’s vociferous defense caught the city by surprise; they were not expecting such an organized and widespread reaction. According to Nash, “San Francisco was bewildered and incensed at the public unwillingness that it should have Hetch Hetchy as a reservoir” (*Wilderness* 169). Moreover, many club members were caught off-guard and in a dilemma; this impassioned campaign revealed a deep rift within the Sierra Club itself. With the club headquartered in San Francisco, a significant minority of members actually supported, if uneasily, the damming of Hetch Hetchy. This schism became so intense that in order to save the Club, Muir and other dam opponents had to launch a new and separate organization, the Society for the Preservation of National Parks, to organize and finance the dam protest. Starting on December 16, 1908, congressional hearings were held to determine whether Secretary Garfield had the right to revoke Secretary Hitchcock’s denial of San Francisco’s application to develop Hetch Hetchy for water capture and storage.

In April 1908, the Taft Administration succeeded the Roosevelt and Secretary Garfield was replaced by Richard A. Ballinger. Preservationists were ambivalent about
Taft; he had not distinguished himself in any way concerning environmental issues. Roosevelt, though, had become a deep disappointment to Muir and like-minded wilderness advocates. While arguably doing more than any other President before or since to increase and protect wilderness land in the country, Roosevelt had become a convinced and energetic believer in Pinchot's utilitarian conservationism. In a 1906 speech he went so far as to say "in all forestry matters I have put my conscience in the keeping of Gifford Pinchot" (Nash, Wilderness 163). At an earlier time, Roosevelt had seemed completely captured by Muir's preservationist outlook and rhetoric. Of a 1901 camping trip with Muir in Yosemite, Roosevelt writes: "lying out at night under those giant sequoias was lying in a temple built by no hand of man, a temple grander than any human architect could by any possibility build, and I hope for the preservation of the groves of giant trees simply because it would be a shame to our civilization to let them disappear" (Bade II: 412-3). Muir thought that the longer Roosevelt stayed in Washington, and out of the soul-healing wilderness, the more pragmatic and utilitarian he became. Muir's first impulse with the new administration was thus understandable: he wanted to get Taft and Ballinger out to Yosemite to see it for themselves. This he accomplished in October 1908, when he gave a personal tour of Yosemite Valley to President Taft and managed to get some of his party, though not the sedentary President himself, into the remote and rugged Hetch Hetchy. His evaluation of this experiential persuasion was positive: "everything looks positive for our side of the fight tho of course nothing quotable has been given out" (Clements 192).
For the dam promoters' part, from the beginning they tried to simply ignore the preservationists, whom Manson referred to as "mis-guided sentimentalists and enthusiasts" (Clements 193), and portrayed the struggle as a fight between the greedy and avaricious desires of the Spring Valley Water Company and the righteous needs of San Franciscans. Muir and other preservationists were uneasy about their common interests with the water company and tried to distance themselves from it. Spring Valley, however, needing some positive PR, became a vocal advocate of the restorative powers of wilderness. This unfortunate alliance had a significant and deleterious effect on the preservationists' ethos, especially in the Bay area. Many citizens, who had become habituated to hating the water company could not forgive the preservationists for "siding" with the extortionist monopoly.

Preservationists, as will be discussed further below, directed their energies towards persuading a national audience that Hetch Hetchy should not be damned, while city officials and conservationists such as Pinchot focused on the voters of San Francisco and the key politicians in Washington who would ultimately decide the issue. On January 14, 1910, preservationists suffered a major local defeat, when San Francisco voters overwhelmingly approved a bond issue that would finance the building of the dam. This setback was somewhat mitigated the next month, when, on February 25, Interior Secretary Ballinger, who had replaced Garfield, declared that San Francisco must show cause as to why the Garfield permit should not be revoked. This placed the burden of proof squarely on the city, but the hearings that began on May 25, 1910 eventuated in the decision that the resolution of the matter was a Congressional concern; this decision set
the stage for the Congressional hearings of 1913. For these hearings, in both the House and Senate, city officials used the language and *mythos* of Conservation to make their case, and they made it well. The debates eventually resulted in the approval of the Raker Bill which gave Congressional blessing to San Francisco's plans for Hetch Hetchy. In February 1914, President Woodrow Wilson's signature approving the bill finally concluded the long battle over Hetch Hetchy.

In the remainder of this chapter, I look at the rhetoric of both the conservationists and preservationists in order to illuminate the use, both effective and ineffective, of *mythos* in this seven year debate. I should emphasize that my attention in the following rhetorical analysis, as well as my focus in the preceding history, is preoccupied with the conservationist and preservationist split over this issue. The historical event itself, however, was much more complex than a clear-cut fight between spiritually focused preservationists and utility focused conservationists. One might as easily focus on this rhetorical situation as a debate between public utilities and private corporations, between sectional and party interests, between regional and national interests, or as an example of backroom political deal-making.

My focus on the preservationist and conservationist opposition is in no way an attempt to "explain" why Hetch Hetchy was ultimately dammed\(^\text{12}\) (though I do suggest ways in which the preservationist cause might have been better served rhetorically). My focus is on one strand of ideological discourse within a complex rhetorical rope, and, as Richard Slotkin points out, ideology itself serves to falsely simplify an issue: "The
language of ideology tends inevitably to oversimplify the social and cultural conflicts it represents. This is because it is the language of power, and its function in a crisis is to rationalize and facilitate a particular line of action. Thus it tends to misrepresent the complexity and the ambivalence of perception and intention of the social/cultural entity that produces it” (Fatal 499). My goal is to illustrate how environmental rhetoric and values were evident in the discourse surrounding the debate and to show how the mythic dimensions of one particular rhetorical situation emerged within a controversy that contained many arguably discrete situations. As Roderick Nash says of this debate, “For the first time in the American experience the competing claims of wilderness and civilization to a specific area received a thorough hearing before a national audience” (Nash, Wilderness 162). It is this aspect of the debate I discuss below.

Wilderness Anxiety

Nash asserts that “the most significant aspect of Hetch Hetchy was that it occurred at all. One hundred or even fifty years earlier a similar proposal to dam a wild river would not have occasioned the slightest ripple of public protest” (Call 15). Americans at the turn of the century had become acutely aware of the tremendous transformations that had occurred in the previous fifty years owing both to startling new technologies and with the continent’s changing political geography. In 1890, the Superintendent of the Census declared the American frontier closed. Expansion into and development of “empty” space had shaped the country’s history for the previous three centuries, and the official notice from the country’s chief demographer that this phase of
history was over had deep psychological and social impact. As Richard Slotkin puts it, "... the end of the frontier was imagined [by many] as a permanent expulsion from Eden, to be followed by subordination, poverty, toil, and strife" (*Fatal 40*). For many, Hetch Hetchy became a manifest symbol of the loss of the Garden. For many others, Hetch Hetchy stood for the unlimited potential for humans to recreate and improve upon the Gardens of creation, to bring about Heaven on Earth. Henry Adams, though frightened by this Promethean attitude, eloquently captures this technophilic spirit: "Man had translated himself into a new universe which had no common scale of measurement with the old. The dynamo became a symbol of infinity. As he grew accustomed to a great gallery of machines, he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the cross" (381).

Loss of the nation’s wilderness also prompted a “back to nature” movement in the early part of the century, a movement that was very much in vogue during the Hetch Hetchy debates and directly colored and shaped the discourse surrounding the fate of a particular wilderness site. Theodore Roosevelt perhaps best epitomizes this movement, with his rugged camping expeditions and his lectures on the moral importance of a strenuous outdoor life, especially for men and boys. As Carolyn Merchant puts it: “As wilderness vanishes before advancing civilization, its remnants must be preserved as test zones for men... to hone male strength and skills (147). Once wilderness was “defeated” as a frightening enemy and overwhelming obstacle to national progress, many Americans found it necessary to return, mythologically, if not physically, in a “hero quest” to the site of this epic and epochal battle. Slotkin posits that “civilized men and
women leave contemporary society, and enter a primitive primal world. If they can seize
the natural original power immanent in that world, and if they can defeat the forces that
seek to prevent their return to civilization, then on their return they will be capable of
renewing the moral and physical powers of the society they originally left” (Fatal 63).

This mythic quest was played out in both the literature and group activities of the
era. Jack London’s The Call of the Wild, published in 1903, about a gentle and
domesticated family dog who finds his inner-wolf, was an immensely popular book, for
both children and adults. City-crammed and anxious Americans identified (or wanted to
identify) with London’s canine hero:

Irresistible impulses seized him… From the forest came the call (or one
note of it, for the call was many noted), distinct and definite as never
before,—a long drawn howl, like, yet unlike, any noise made by husky
dog. And he knew it, in the old familiar way, as a sound heard before.
(74)

He was a killer, a thing that preyed, living on the things that lived,
unaided, alone, by virtue of his own strength and prowess, surviving
triumphantly in a hostile environment where only the strong survived…
A carnivorous animal, living on a straight meat diet, he was in full flower,
at the high tide of life, overspilling with vigor and virility. (77)

Ernest Thomas Seton, who founded the Boy Scout movement in the United States
in 1910, believed that American manhood was degenerating because of its sissified,
citified environment and believed that this debasement could be reversed by returning
boys to the wilderness: “To combat the system that has turned such a large number of our
robust, manly, self-reliant manhood into a lot of flat-chested cigarette-smokers, with
shaky nerves and doubtful vitality, I began the Woodcraft movement in America” (xi).
Though focusing on male youth, Seton believed that the entire populace would benefit by answering the call of the wild: “I should like to lead this whole nation into the way of living outdoors for at least a month each year, reviving and expanding a custom that as far back as Moses was deemed essential to the national well-being (vii). For Seton, as with Roosevelt and many others of the time, the tonic of wilderness was especially necessary because of the United States’ emergence as a global colonial and military power: “In the first place we have to recognize that our nation is in need of help, from within, if it is to maintain its position as a leading factor for peace and prosperity among the other nations of the earth” (37).

The Hetch Hetchy debate was shaped not only by this “back to nature” movement, which, of course, required that there be undeveloped “nature” to go back to, but a growing belief, based on Frederick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis, that what made the United States unique among nations was its having recently, in living memory in fact, defeated an untamed continent. As Slotkin states, “what gives America its moral-political preeminence among the empires of the world, what gives American national character its uniqueness, is the experience of conquering the natural wilderness” (Fatal 223). Nash argues that “wilderness was the basic ingredient of American civilization. In the raw materials of the physical wilderness Americans built a civilization. With the idea or symbol of wilderness, they sought to give that civilization identity and meaning” (Wilderness xi).

This created some mythic dissonance for many pro-development and conservationist citizens in that American pride and identity stemmed from having
conquered the wilderness, yet remnants of that wilderness were necessary as a point of comparison, a benchmark for just how much had been “accomplished” in the last three hundred years: “pride continued to stem from the conquest of wild country, but… wilderness was [eventually] recognized as a cultural and moral resource, and a basis for national self-esteem” (Nash, Wilderness 67). So, even the most enthusiastic engineer appreciated and took pride in wilderness.\textsuperscript{13} Preservationists also had great pride in American wilderness, but they valued wilderness as a point of comparison and benchmark for judging the corrupt and degenerate civilization. So while both sides valued wilderness,\textsuperscript{14} they did so for very different reasons. This disparity delineated one of the most important questions of the debate: who owns Hetch Hetchy?

**Wilderness Ownership**

Much of the preservationist effort focused on portraying San Francisco as attempting to steal a national treasure for local convenience. J. Horace McFarland, President of the American Civic association asked the Congressional Committee on Public Lands to consider the “general interests of the American public as the owners of Yosemite National Park” and urged the committee to decide whether it was “more important for San Francisco to have the Hetch Hetchy valley than for the whole country to have the Hetch Hetchy valley?” (United States 29). Robert Underwood Johnson, editor of *Century* magazine, insisted to the same committee that “Hetch Hetchy Valley, one of the most beautiful gorges of the Sierras, as part of the Yosemite National Park,
was set aside in 1890, by reason of its scenery, for the recreation and use of all the people” (United States 31), not just the greedy San Franciscans.

Johnson goes on to argue before the committee that granting San Francisco a dam permit would set a dangerous precedent; a decision in the city’s favor “would place the great natural scenery of the country at the service of any neighboring city which should consider its appropriation necessary or even desirable” (United States 31). This preservationist tactic depended entirely on the mythic stature of wilderness as a national garden and indisputable heritage for all Americans. I illustrate below how the conservationists attempted to defuse this argument by reconstructing the situation, while retaining the mythic importance of wilderness in their own arguments. Muir, characteristically, raises the stakes even higher, claiming that Hetch Hetchy’s loss will be universal, not merely national (United States 32). The Society for the Protection of National Parks recruited supporters from across the country, including such groups as the American Alpine Club, the Appalachian Mountain Club, the American Civic Association, and the General Federation of Women’s Clubs. It also gained the support of such eminent men and women as Harvard President, Charles Eliot; New York’s Central Park designer, Frederick Law Olmstead; the “father” of Rocky Mountain National Park, Enos Mills; the novelist, Ellen Glasgow; and the editor of Poetry magazine, Harriet Monroe (Fox 143). San Francisco’s support came primarily from local and state leaders and committed conservationists, such as Pinchot, working within the Roosevelt, Taft, and Wilson administrations.
Part of the explanation as to why preservationists were able to rally the support of an eastern and urban audience was the very fact that the audience was eastern and urban. As Nash argues in *Wilderness and the American Mind*, wilderness has been valued "as wilderness" in this country in direct correlation to its absence: "From the perspective of city streets and comfortable homes, wild country inspired quite different attitudes than it had when observed from a frontiersman’s clearing" (143). Another reason city officials did not attempt a full-scale national campaign is that many supporters within the massive national following Pinchot had wooed in his forestry campaigns had largely turned against him on this issue. As Hays points out, the "new interest in conservation, which dominated the movement between 1908 and 1910 came primarily from middle- and upper-income urban dwellers," including prominently, women's organizations such as the General Federation of Women's Clubs and the Daughters of the American Revolution (Hays 142). These supporters, while enthusiastically embracing Pinchot's calls to save the nation's forest, never really accepted the utilitarian *mythos* that underlay Pinchot's conservation. According to Hays,

A wide difference in attitude separated Roosevelt, Pinchot, and Garfield from the new enthusiasts. The newer elements had little appreciation for rational and comprehensive planning, and the Roosevelt administrators, in turn, viewed with distrust the emotional fervor they aroused.... It was especially difficult to approach resource development in a rational manner when one's major political support now came from groups who looked upon the problem in moral rather than economic terms and preferred to reserve resources from economic use rather than to apply technology to their development. (145-146)
While succeeding in appealing to an eastern audience, preservationists had another problem: virtually none of their eastern audience had ever seen Hetch Hetchy. Muir and others knew that the strongest persuasive appeal for saving Hetch Hetchy was a direct experience of the valley itself. Preservationists spent a lot of time, effort, and money, trying to get influential politicians from the east into Hetch Hetchy in order for these decision makers to have a personal encounter with the actual wilderness. Muir held that “none, as far as [he had] learned, of the thousands who have visited the park, is in favor of this destructive and wholly unnecessary water scheme” (United States 32).

While succeeding in getting some easterners into the park, Muir knew that most could only experience the valley through second-hand reports. Muir wrote The Yosemite with precisely this knowledge in mind. He invites the reader to “imagine yourself in Hetch Hetchy on a sunny day in June, standing waist deep in grass and flowers” (280-4).

Frederick Bade’s testimony to Congress included a first person narrative of his first trip through the valley, a narrative that positions the listener as a camping companion on the trip (United States 226-230). There is no evidence that those in favor of the dam from a conservationist/utilitarian perspective ever invited any supporters or potential supporters into the valley; Pinchot himself never saw Hetch Hetchy (Jones 108).

Improving the Wilderness

Conservationist arguments, not surprisingly, centered on the usefulness of the reservoir and the uselessness of the undeveloped valley. Dam promoters for the city
described Hetch Hetchy as “inaccosssible, uninhabited, entirely useless” (United States 6). Secretary Garfield held that “the highest purposes for which it could be used” would be to satisfy “the great needs of the city of San Francisco for an adequate and pure water supply” (United States 9). Garfield insisted that “domestic use was the highest use to which water could be put” (United States 18). This insistence echoes Pinchot’s earlier claim that “Every river is a unit from its source to its mouth. If it is to be given its highest usefulness to all the people, and serve them for all the uses they can make of it, it must be developed with that idea clearly in mind” (Fight 54). Given the utilitarian penchant to see usefulness in strictly economic terms, it is not surprising that Representative Raker, who sponsored the final bill permitting Hetch Hetchy’s damming, reduced the issue to actual dollars and cents, arguing that the “old barren rocks” of the valley were worth less than $300,000, while the dam would be worth millions (Nash, Wilderness 171). One engineer in the city’s employ gave voice to the utopian dreams of utilitarian “improvement” by declaring that “there is no engineer alive, when he dreams of paradise, who would not think that he was building a dam at the foot of the Hetch Hetchy Valley” (United States 49). This co-construction of the technological “improvement” of nature with dreams of paradise is, as demonstrated in the previous chapter on Pinchot, clearly at the core of the conservationists mythos. Conservationists were advocates of what Kenneth Burke has called “technologism”—the belief that problems of technology can (and must) be solved with more technology (Dramatism and Development 53). The crucial point here is that conservationist arguments for the damming of Hetch Hetchy, given the emerging national consensus that wilderness had real value, had to be careful
not to call for the destruction of wilderness; instead, those arguments insisted that wildness could be improved through human agency.

A major argument of the city and their conservationist supporters was that rather than diminish the wilderness value of the Hetch Hetchy Valley, the proposed reservoir would increase its wilderness value. Pinchot stated that "as to my attitude regarding the proposed use of Hetch Hetchy by the city of San Francisco... I am fully persuaded that... the injury... by substituting a lake for the present swampy floor of the valley... is altogether unimportant compared with the benefits to be derived from its use as a reservoir" (Nash, Wilderness 161). Secretary Garfield told the congressional committee:

I fully appreciated that feeling on the part of those gentlemen [the preservationists], and fully appreciated the obligation that Congress had placed upon me to preserve those tracts for the purpose, not only of the nation's playgrounds, but for the purpose of preserving the great curiosities and great beauty of that region. On the other hand, in weighing the two sides of this question, I felt that there could be no doubt but that it should be resolved in favor of the citizens of San Francisco, because this use of the valley would not destroy it as one of the most beautiful spots in the West. It would simply change the floor of the valley from a meadow to a beautiful lake, and it could be so constructed as not to interfere with the access of people to that portion of the park. (United States 9)

Likewise, Congressman Englebright insisted to his colleagues that "as it is a lake, it will be one of great natural beauty. There will be fine fishing in it and boating, and so on, which would make to that extent the lake an improvement to the park" (United States 23). Muir's response to this line of reasoning is important: "Damming it would enhance its beauty? As well say damming New York's Central Park would enhance its beauty. (United States 32). With this conservationist argument and the preservationist rebuttals
that it prompted, a serious digression in the Preservationist use of *mythos* appears, a digression that will be considered in detail below: i.e. rather than responding to the Conservationist claims from their own mythological orientation, which would insist that the valley’s *recreational* value has nothing to do with its *wilderness* value, the preservationists try to refute the argument through utilitarian arguments of human subjective appreciation and enjoyment. William Colby’s refutation is typical:

Mr. Pinchot is convinced that the damming of the Yosemite-like floor of Hetch Hetchy will be less destructive to the scenic beauty of the national park than has been feared. His contention is that it will be converted into a "beautiful lake." He compares it to Crater Lake and Tahoe. It must be remembered that it is a reservoir which is to be created, and not merely a lake; that it is to be drawn from to an increasing extent as the years go by; that the warm summer climate and low elevation of the floor of this Yosemite Valley, with its vegetable mold only covered with a comparatively slight depth of water, are going to produce a tremendous aquatic growth, and as the waters recede unsightly margins of slime and decay will be exposed, with the accompanying disagreeable odors. (United States 33)

By agreeing to argue utility, in this case aesthetic utility, instead of intrinsic worth, the preservationists lost the home-field advantage and, as will be demonstrated, found themselves making inconsistent and self-defeating claims. Evidence that the “true” preservationist perspective was lacking in this argument can be deduced by the bizarre argumentative hypothesis of one dam supporter, a hypothesis which completely misses the essential preservationist orientation toward wilderness.

Let me now for a moment assume that instead of the beautiful emerald meadow of the Hetch Hetchy there were a lake in this vicinity, a lake just
such as San Francisco wishes to create. Such a lake would be unique in this country. There is none other like it. Surrounded by steep walls, towering at places almost vertically in heights of 1500 to 2000 feet, the lake of crystal clear water would be most picturesque in its setting. Suppose now such a lake being there, in a national forest reserve, that someone should discover that by draining it a beautiful meadow of some 600 acres would be uncovered... and that the natural beauty and attractiveness of the lake ought to be sacrificed... for camping and thereby to create a little Yosemite. Let me ask whether any demonstration, however plausible, would lead any government department having such matters in charge into an assent to such a scheme? Such action would be inconceivable. The lake would be preserved and protected. Why, then, if such a lake is to be artificially created, should not the same reasoning apply. That the lake is to be artificial should not weigh in the matter.

(United States 425-426)

Though his logic is suspect from any perspective, this conservationist is able to completely ignore the true preservationist point. The documentary record shows that preservationist participants in the debate allowed this kind of response by their unwillingness to promote the essential and intrinsic value of wilderness.

The Sacred Valley

My criticism of the preservationists’ rhetoric is not that they attempted to refute the utilitarian arguments of the conservationists with utilitarian counter-points but that they attempted to save Hetch Hetchy by making logical appeals for the resolution of the debate based on utility (the best use and cultivation of the garden) while their appreciation of Hetch Hetchy was still very much rooted in the sense of the wilderness as a Garden-Temple—sacred, inviolate, and immaculate. This led them into untenable and, ultimately, indefensible, positions on the issue.
It is clear the Muir and other preservationists believed the Hetch Hetchy Valley was sacred land. Muir was adamant: "Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for watertanks the people's cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man" (Yosemite 291). And, he was explicit in his representation of Hetch Hetchy as a sacred Garden-Temple: "It appears, therefore, that Hetch Hetchy Valley, far from being a plain, common, rock-bound meadow, as many who have not seen it seem to suppose, is a grand landscape garden, one of Nature's rarest and most precious mountain temples" (Yosemite 284-5). Muir spoke of the roar of Wapana, one of the large waterfalls in the valley, which like all the falls would be significantly diminished by the rising waters of the reservoir as, "the thunder of His chariot wheels in power" (United States 39). Dam supporters, according to Muir, were "temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, [who] seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature, and instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the Mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar" (Yosemite 286).16

Muir's fellow preservationists also portrayed Hetch Hetchy as sacred land in their arguments. Bade constructs the valley as the holy land, and says of the rivers and streams in its watershed, "All of them are true Jordans" (United States 29). Johnson, in an editorial, claimed that the debate came down to a choice between "worship and sacrilege" (Nash, Wilderness 177). Another dam opponent testified, "No man can visit this place without getting great good in every sense of the word... it is God's temple, and the children of men should not be robbed of it for material reasons" (United States 323). Telegrams poured into Congress from across the country asking, "Is there nothing to be
held sacred by this nation?, and lamenting "the desecration of God's own temple," as well as claiming that "Man cannot visit without feeling the presence of Almighty God there" (United States 323-324).

The mythic orientation of preservationists, which made them see Hetch Hetchy as a sacred Garden-Temple, led them to see their defense of the valley as a Holy War. Muir saw the fight as "part of the eternal battle between right and wrong" (United States 32). According to Nash, "John Muir... saw the defense of Hetch Hetchy as an opportunity to serve the Lord" (Call 14); Muir wrote that "we may lose this particular fight but truth and right must prevail at last. Anyhow we must be true to ourselves and the Lord" (Nash, Wilderness 167). After losing the fight, Muir wrote, "Fortunately wrong cannot last; soon or late it must fall back to Hades, while some compensating good must surely follow" (Bade 386).

One of the reasons the Preservationist response to San Francisco's plans to flood the valley was so vociferous was that they not only believed Hetch Hetchy to be sacred, but, because of its status as part of a national park, to be consecrated land, a protected Garden-Temple. Muir, speaking of Hetch Hetchy, claimed "it is one of God's best gifts and ought to be faithfully guarded (United States 39). Remember that Muir desired the national parks to be guarded by troops to protect them from poachers, trappers, and rogue timber operations; San Francisco's desires seemed like a full-scale invasion by comparison. The Act creating Yosemite National Park of October, 1890 required the Secretary of the Interior to "provide for the preservation from injury of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities, or wonders and their retention in their natural
condition [emphasis added]" (United States 42). The Right of Way Act of 1902 which provided for limited development within parks, at the Secretary of the Interior's discretion, made the protected status of National Parks very ambiguous. Preservationists, of course, invoked the 1890 Act, while dam promoters favored the 1902 Act. Preservationists were very concerned about the precedent that would be set by allowing the dam in Hetch Hetchy. Johnson pled with the congressional committee:

I beg this honorable committee also to pause and reflect how far-reaching and perilous is the precedent set by this action of Secretary Garfield. It places the great treasures of scenery, the care of which should be a trust for the civilized world, at the mercy of any similar demand. The whole country is aroused to our wastefulness and neglect of such treasures, and the whole country, when it comes to understand the meaning of this bill, will be shocked at the proposition to throw to the wolves so fair an offspring of Creation as the Hetch Hetchy. (United States 38)

Muir makes explicit the connection in his and other Preservationists' minds, between the holy Garden-Temple and the failures of the government to provide protection: "God began the reservation system in Eden and this first reserve included only one tree. Yet even so moderate a reserve was attacked... There are trees in heaven that are safe from politicians, but there are none here" (National Parks 1: 566).

Muir believed he was spreading the "Tuolumne Gospel," and he and his allies, not surprisingly, represented dam proponents as snakes in the garden; San Francisco became "the Prince of the Powers of Darkness;" dam promoters were "Satan and Co." and "money changers in the temple" (Yosemite 287). For Muir, San Francisco is the "Father of Lies," and again, Muir's invocation of the Edenic myth is explicit:
That anyone would try to destroy such a place seems incredible; but sad experience shows that there are people good enough and bad enough for anything. The proponents of the dam scheme bring forward a lot of bad arguments to prove that the only righteous thing to do with the people’s parks is to destroy them bit by bit as they are able. Their arguments are curiously like those of the devil, devised for the destruction of the first garden—so much of the very best Eden fruit going to waste; so much of the best Tuolumne water and Tuolumne scenery going to waste. Few of their statements are even partly true, and all are misleading. (Yosemite 290)

Johnson, too, is explicit in his mythic construction of the fight, claiming of San Francisco’s intentions, “Satan himself would never have dared play such tricks with the Garden of Eden (United States 37).

This construction of wilderness as sacred and conservationists who dare to disrupt it as evil carries with it a range of rhetorical and ethical problems, problems rooted in its essentially elitist world-view. Nevertheless, the preservationist attempt here is to re-orient the values of civilization towards wilderness. This representation of wilderness as holy land, and the preservationists as defenders of a consecrated part of it from material development, can be seen, according to Nash, as representing the “broader struggle to maintain intangibles against the pressure of utilitarian demands” (Nash, Wilderness 166). Preservationists believed that their message could transform American culture; Muir held that “as soon as the light comes the awakened million creates a public opinion that overcomes wrong however cunningly veiled” (Bade II: 401). Muir and fellow preservationists’ rhetoric, forgiving for a moment its sometimes off-putting and

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exclusionary self-righteousness, was an attempt to re-orient society’s wilderness values.

Burke describes re-orientation as

a revised system of meanings, an altered conception of how the world is put together. It is insisted that, if we change our ways of acting to bring them more in accord with the new meanings (rejecting old means and selecting new means as a better solution for the problem as now rephrased) we shall bring ourselves and our group nearer to the good life. (Permanence 107)

This preservationist call for re-orientation is especially evident in the implorations of Robert Underwood Johnson, editor of Century magazine and one of Muir’s most influential and hardest-working allies in the fight. “In Johnson’s eyes wild country was like fine arts or belles lettres—a fragile yet priceless commodity that needed defense against the insensitivity of his countrymen” (Nash, Call 13). Johnson, like Muir, directly questioned the socio-cultural values underlying San Francisco’s attempts to flood Hetch Hetchy. He told the congressional committee: “I protest in the name of all lovers of beauty—and in the name of rare, of phenomenal beauty—against the materialistic idea that there must be something wrong about a man who finds one of the highest uses of nature in the fact that it is made to be looked at. Such so-called practical men would have their days full correcting the mistakes of the Almighty in this respect (United States 38).

While this declaration clearly confronts a merely materialistic world-view, notice how it, like conservationist arguments, accepts the essential assumptions of utility. Wilderness has value here, but only in its aesthetic usefulness; its value is directly correlated to its objectification: “it is made to be looked at.”
The Usefulness of Hetch Hetchy

By advocating its aesthetic and recreational utility, preservationists were complicitous in the conservationist reduction of wilderness to mere material. William Colby, one of Muir's closest allies in the fight, goes so far as to represent Muir not as the wilderness prophet but as a preeminent authority on scenery: "The greatest judges of scenery in the world who have both visited this valley many times—John Muir, the author, and William Keith the artist—both say that in many respects it rivals the Yosemite and they are both most positive that its use as a reservoir will have a most destructive effect on its scenic beauty" (United States 33). Preservationists found themselves arguing not just for aesthetic utility, but for the economic worth of scenery. Colby claims that Pinchot, in his siding with San Francisco,

overlooks entirely the economic value of scenery, and the fact that millions frequent the Alps each year for recreation alone. The Hetch Hetchy Valley is of infinitely greater economic importance to the nation and the State of California, with its park-like floor, intact and available for campers, than it will be as a reservoir site. This nation can afford to pay millions to prevent this desecration as far as economy and dollars and cents are concerned. (United States 33)

By 1908, almost all preservationist rhetoric centered on the question as to what would be the best "use" of Hetch Hetchy. This capitulation to a utilitarian argumentative framework might be seen as unavoidable. Perhaps the American public was not ready for arguments for the protection of Hetch Hetchy that were too openly based on its intrinsic value as wilderness. We do know that Muir's radical wilderness ethos became
an easy target towards which dam supporters could direct their own *ad hominem* attacks. Mayor Phelan told Secretary Garfield that “John Muir loves the Sierras and roams at large, and is hypersensitive on the invasion of his territory. The 400,000 people of San Francisco are suffering from bad water and ask Mr. Muir to cease his aesthetic quibbling” (Fox 141). The mayor also said of Muir: “I am sure he would sacrifice his own family for the preservation of beauty. He considers human life very cheap, and he considers the works of God Superior” (Marsh 316). William Kent, creator of Muir Woods and Congressional Representative from Bay Area told Congress: “I hope you will not take my friend, Muir, seriously, for he is a man entirely without social sense. With him, it is me and God and the rock where God put it, and that is the end of the story” (Nash, *Wilderness* 174). We do know that the preservationists became very sensitive to such charges and went out of their way to argue that they were not misanthropic. Johnson spent much of his time in front of the Committee on Public Lands defending Preservationists from charges that they loved wilderness more than people (United States 32). 17

Regardless of what motivated the preservationists to retreat from an insistence on the innate and intrinsic value of wilderness or whether such a retreat was avoidable, it is clear that by arguing for Hetch Hetchy on the basis of its best “use” they were led into uncomfortable, inconsistent, and ultimately untenable positions, positions unsustainable by a *mythos* grounded in the wilderness as a sacred Garden-Temple. Preservationists found themselves arguing not for the preservation of Hetch Hetchy as a wilderness, but for the *development* of Hetch Hetchy as a national playground!
At an earlier time, Muir had insisted that “the Yosemite National Park was created in order that the... great natural wonderland should be preserved in pure wilderness for all time” (Our National Parks 46). By 1908, Muir and other preservationists fighting to “save” Hetch Hetchy were calling for the construction of a road into the valley, trails around its rim, and improved campsites on the valley floor (Jones 106). Preservationists also called for a hotel to be built in the valley (Jones 139). These bizarre requests for the “preservation” of wilderness were motivated by two factors: The first was that, as discussed above, preservationists thought that the most persuasive argument against the dam was experiential knowledge of Hetch Hetchy itself, the second, and more significant factor, was that once agreeing to argue from the standpoint of the valley’s utility, the preservationists found themselves constrained to arguing for its usefulness to humans alone.

One of the key features of Hetch Hetchy was that unlike Yosemite Valley it was in a state of wilderness at the turn of the century. And, as pointed out earlier, this was, ironically one of the valley’s features that caused San Francisco to covet it—it was remote and inaccessible, visited by very few humans, and thus free of contaminants. Rather than capitalize on this feature as the greatest reason not to develop it, to keep it in a state of wilderness, preservationists saw this feature as a liability and began to promote the valley’s amenability to “improvement” and greater accessibility to the people of the nation. Muir claimed that “after a wagon road has been made into it and its wonders become better known it will be visited by countless thousands of admiring travelers from
all parts of the world," and that damming it would keep it closed to thousands of potential visitors:

If dammed and submerged as proposed, Hetch Hetchy would be rendered utterly inaccessible for travel, since no road could be built around the borders of the reservoir without tunneling through solid granite cliffs, and these camp grounds would be destroyed and access to other important places to the north and south of the valley interfered with, and the high Sierra gateway of the sublime Tuolumne Canyon leading up to the ground central camp ground of the upper Tuolumne Valley would be completely blocked and closed. (*Yosemite 234*)

If a wilderness is to be made useful, from a humanistic, utilitarian perspective, it must be made accessible and amenable to thousands of human visitors, which, of course, contradicts its status as wilderness. William Colby, an eventual President of the Sierra Club, went so far as to advocate “clearing boulders, improving drainage, and liberally spraying petroleum to combat mosquitoes” in the valley (*Jones 139*), all in order to make camping there a more pleasant experience.

Muir and other preservationists found the elitist implications of their mythic version of the Garden-Temple to be a grave argumentative disadvantage when dam promoters, like Mardsen Manson, could lampoon their exclusionary rhetoric. Manson scoffed, “It is full of temples, placed by the hand of the almighty... in order that only those devotees whose worship is pure shall ever reach their gates, shut out forever from the weak, gaping crowd, who have not the energy nor the soul to appreciate their grandeur” (*Oravecz 450*). Preservationists did not respond to Manson’s claim that “not one-tenth of the [park] area is accessible to any but the hardiest mountaineer” (*Oravecz
by arguing that inaccessibility is a defining feature of wilderness, but by clamoring
to build roads into the valley. Preservationists, once committing themselves to an
argument based on utility, the defining mythos of their opposition, found themselves at
the mercy of men like Pinchot who could argue, “If we had nothing else to consider than
the delight of the few men and women who go into the Hetch Hetchy Valley, then it
should be left in its natural condition” (Oravecz 452). So the preservationists tried to
outdevelop the developers!

Preservationists also found themselves in the peculiar position of arguing that the
pristine wilderness they wanted to save was not really all that pure. While promoting
greater accessibility to campers on one hand, on the other, Muir argued that the site
would not make for a clean reservoir because of all the filthy campers. He insisted that
the Tuolumne was “less pure than that of most of the other Sierra streams, because of the
sewerage of camp grounds draining into it, especially of the Big Tuolumne Meadows
camp-ground, occupied by hundreds of tourists and mountaineers, with their animals, for
months every summer, soon to be followed by thousands from all over the world”
(Yosemite 291). Muir, the prophet of holy and immaculate wilderness, was faced with a
rhetorical dilemma. He was at once insisting on the sacrosanct nature of a wilderness
Garden-Temple, and at the same time arguing that it be preserved so that the unclean
masses could come in and trash it.

At moments a “truer” preservationist orientation emerged in the debate, as when
Johnson lamented that “the valley itself is to be wiped out of existence, and a tame
expanse of water, the work of man, substituted for the exquisite and wonderful
handiwork of God. The coolness with which these gentlemen endeavor to forestall the feeling of revolt against this desecration by saying that they propose to improve upon this exquisite creation of delight and repose is little short of blasphemy (United States 37). Muir too, calls attention the various flora and fauna which would be displaced, if not destroyed, by the reservoir (United States 49). But these isolated biocentric considerations are, for the most part, absent from the preservationist rhetoric in the debate.

By fighting the battle on the conservationists’ familiar terrain of utility, the Preservationists ended up not fighting for the preservation of wilderness, but for an alternate, only less, materialistic version of utility. By not arguing for the intrinsic value of wilderness as wilderness—which at the least implies undeveloped and not easily accessible land, Preservationists allowed their opponents in this issue to construct themselves as wilderness advocates as well. No one in the debate argued against wilderness; the mythic concept of wilderness, however ambiguous in the public mind, was simply too powerful and seductive at the time. Because of preservationist acquiescence to centering the debate on use, the issue devolved to a debate about the most efficient and democratic use to which wilderness could be put, a discussion that conservationists were bound to win. Discussions about the value of wilderness as wilderness would be delayed until later in the century.\textsuperscript{18}
1 The Tuolumne drains 1,501 square miles of Western Sierra; the greater part of its water falls as snow (United States 6).

2 In 1908, San Franciscans were using 35,000,000 of water gallons per day (United States 32). "By the end of 1913 no major urban complex, outside of the San Francisco Bay area, was unable to provide water for its people through a public agency" (Lowitt 191).

3 An approximately 200 mile long pipeline and aqueduct now brings water from Hetch Hetchy reservoir to the city.

4 This grant is remarkable in that it was the first time Congress had ever set aside a tract of land to be used for the purposes of outdoor recreation and leisure.

5 Southern Pacific saw the potential tourists dollars in park visitation. "The railroad interests hoped that Yellowstone would become a popular national vacation mecca, like Niagara Falls or Saratoga Springs, with resulting profit to the only transportation line serving it. A wilderness was the last thing they wanted" (Nash, Wilderness 111).

6 Yellowstone National Park was created in 1872.

7 See the previous chapter for a discussion of the Forest Reserves.

8 This redrawing and the sacrifice of some 429 acres was done with preservationist approval, if not blessing. The redrawing was done to settle troublesome in-holding claims and to make the park boundary lines more closely conform to the geologic landscape.

9 Preservationists sent literature to 1418 newspapers (Nash, Wilderness 170).

10 By the time he left office Roosevelt had added 148,000,000 acres to the national forests and parks" (Bade II: 414).

11 At another point, Muir asked, "Mr. Roosevelt, when are you going to get beyond the boyishness of killing things... are you not getting far enough along to leave that off?" To which Roosevelt replied, "Muir, I guess you are right."

12 The cynical explanation of the Congressional decision, supported by many historians, is that Hetch Hetchy was an administrative issue already decided before the Congressional hearings of 1913, and the public rhetoric it generated had little, or nothing, to do with the decisions of Congress or the President. Elmo Richardson argues that politics were largely unswayed by the public rhetoric (249), and he says that the Raker
Bill was “an administration measure that was agreed upon even before the election of 1912” (Richardson 255).

13 William Cronon says: “Thus, in the myth of the vanishing frontier lay the seeds of wilderness preservation in the United States, for if wild land had been so crucial in the making of the nation, then surely one must save its last remnants as monuments to the American past—and as insurance policy to protect its future. It is no accident that the movement to set aside national parks and wilderness areas began to gain real momentum at precisely the time that lamentations about the passing frontier reached their peak. To protect the wilderness was in a very real sense to protect the nation’s most sacred myth of origin” (77).

14 I will return to the point that almost no one in this debate thought of himself or herself as anti-wilderness.

15 “Never before had such a prolonged fight been waged over an apparent exercise in technological progress” (Fox 146).

16 Muir was disappointed in President Taft’s visit to the Park because, according to Muir, “he refused to regard Yosemite as a place to worship in and cracked some pretty poor jokes” (Fox 143).

17 Muir did not help the matter by having earlier asserted: “I am on the side of nature in any conflict with man” (Holliday 137).

18 In December, 1914, just ten months after President Wilson signed the Raker Act granting San Francisco’s request to dam Hetch Hetchy, John Muir died. Although 77 years old, his friends, family, and biographers agree that the battle shortened his life. As for Gifford Pinchot, he would continue his government career, serving as Governor of New Jersey and living until 1949. Although on the “winning” side, Pinchot found the Hetch Hetchy debate so rancorous and divisive (he, like Muir, permanently lost many good friends through the controversy) that he never mentioned the issue again publicly, and in his autobiography and history of conservation in the United States he conspicuously omits all references to Hetch Hetchy.
CONCLUSION

As the preceding chapter illustrates, the fight over Hetch Hetchy, in one sense, was not a debate about wilderness preservation at all because the Preservationist community, through their agreement to argue within the parameters of a utilitarian debate, could not effectively invoke their own *mythos* of wilderness. Wilderness preservation, however, has continued to be an important motive for environmental battles throughout the twentieth century, and these battles show no sign of diminishing as we enter the twenty-first century. At this moment, the fate of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northern Alaska is being hotly contested by preservationists who want to keep the refuge in an “undeveloped” state and those who would like to see the refuge opened up for oil exploration, drilling, and transport. Over and above such specific and overt wilderness debates, wilderness preservation has for the last ninety years been the foundation for a plethora of seemingly unrelated environmental issues. As William Cronon points out, “Although wilderness may today seem to be just one environmental concern among many, it in fact serves as the foundation for a long list of other such concerns that on their face seem quite remote from it. That is why its influence is so pervasive and, potentially, so insidious” (73). In this conclusion I review some of the
lessons that can be drawn from the preceding discussion of an early wilderness debate, with special attention paid to the ways in which the preservationist mythos of wilderness might have been more effectively constructed and employed.

**The Failure of the Preservationist Mythos**

One feature of wilderness made clear in the preceding pages is that the term, “wilderness,” just like the physical land and biota to which it refers, is fiercely contested. There is no clear and agreed upon definition of wilderness. Perhaps the first lesson for rhetors and audiences in environmental discussions is to keep this deep ambiguity in mind. Because of various life orientations and mythic conceptions of wilderness, people may be speaking of very different concepts when using the same term. Cronon points out the inherent dangers of this linguistic and mythic ambiguity: “Ideas of nature never exist outside of a cultural context, and the meanings we assign to nature cannot help reflecting that context. The main reason this gets us into trouble is that nature as essence, nature as naive reality, wants us to see nature as if it had no cultural context, as if it were everywhere and always the same” (35). To borrow Burke’s terminology, “wilderness” is a sort of “god-term,” a concept that is often unambiguous for individual believers but profoundly vague and indeterminate at the social level.

This indeterminacy is one of the reasons why a consideration of mythos is so important when exploring the rhetoric of wilderness. Wilderness myths have a symbolizing function that is evocative rather than referential so they are very amenable to the ambiguity of wilderness. Richard Slotkin holds that “Myth . . . performs its cultural
function by generalizing particular and contingent experiences into the bases of universal
rules of understanding and conduct, and it does this by transforming secular history into a
body of sacred and sanctifying legends” (Fatal 19). In the Hetch Hetchy debate, the
Conservationist myth of the useful, working Garden, rather than the Preservationists’
holy Garden-Temple, became the basis for understanding the issue and deciding proper
conduct.

Slotkin also contends that myth is deployed no less strategically than logic in
rhetoric: “myth and ideology are created and recreated in the midst of historical
contingency, through deliberate acts of human memory, intention, and labor...; myth
has a human/historical rather than a natural or transcendental source and is continually
modified by human experience (Gunfighter 25). In other words, Preservationists chose
not to fully deploy their own mythos in the Hetch Hetchy debate; they were not at the
mercy of the rhetorical situation. And, by making that choice, they allowed the
Conservationist to provide the only solution to the exigence: the Garden must be worked.
Slotkin points out that “We resort to our myths not merely to evade the discontents of
our historical moment, but to find something—a precedent, a bit of wisdom, a new
perspective—that will allow us to imagine a way of coping with and even transforming
the present crisis” (Gunfighter 26). Preservationists permitted the Conservationist
mythos of utility to provide the precedence, the wisdom, and the proper perspective on
Hetch Hetchy.

To further illustrate how the Preservationists failed in the Hetch Hetchy debate, I
return to Roderick Hart’s criteria for the effective use of myth in rhetoric, (discussed in
some detail in Chapter 1). Hart's first criterion is that "Myths provide a heightened sense of authority." Here we see what seems like a glaring mistake by the Preservationists. In John Muir, they had one of most respected and well-loved national personas of the era. Muir's ethos, however, was that of an uncompromising wilderness prophet preaching the green gospel to the masses. By not fully unleashing his true gospel in the debate, Muir was reduced to arguing for an alternative development of Hetch Hetchy rather than its true preservation.

Hart's further criteria also indicate a significant Preservationist failure: "Myths provide a heightened sense of continuity," and "Myth, in short, gives meaning to the present by making it seem continuous with the past." By basing their arguments for the "preservation" of Hetch Hetchy on the Conservationists' myth of progress and human-use, Preservationists cut themselves off from the deeply persuasive power of the Edenic Garden and from Muir's life-long body of work, which in the Hetch Hetchy debate seemed strangely inconsistent with arguments for utilization. Hart also holds that "Myths provide a heightened sense of coherence. Just as myth reaches across time, it reaches across ideas in order to fashion whole, consistent ideologies." It is clear that by abandoning their own mythos to argue on the grounds of utility, Preservationists were led into some very inconsistent positions—remember William Colby, one of Muir's chief lieutenants in the battle, calling for the clearing, draining, and liberal spraying of kerosene in Hetch Hetchy in order to make it more amenable to tourists, and, thus, "preserve" it.
Hart also holds that "Myths provide a heightened sense of community. The best myths are shared myths." Through such blatant inconsistencies as that demonstrated by Colby, the Preservationist community never developed a united front and could not resist the coherent and consistent arguments put forth by Conservationists. Perhaps Hart's most damning criterion is that "Myths provide a heightened sense of choice. Myths dramatize alternatives by dialectically featuring good and evil." By conceding to debate Hetch Hetchy's proper and best use, Preservationists did not offer a real choice between use and preservation; they only quibbled about how best to work the Garden. Burke says that persuasion "is nothing other than an attempt to redefine the situation itself" (Permanence 281). By acquiescing to the Conservationists definition of the situation and their insistence that the exigence had to do with a choice as to best use rather than between use and non-use, Preservationists lost significant persuasive power.

Although failing to effectively deploy it in the Hetch Hetchy debate, I contend that John Muir and other Preservationists embraced a wilderness mythos that, if rehabilitated from its misanthropy and elitism, offers a powerful and consistent foundation for wilderness preservation. I have illustrated how Muir and his allies failed to effectively deploy their mythos in their rhetoric; I now would like to look at two specific features that might have been more effectively invoked in the Hetch Hetchy debate and have in the years since that struggle provided effective and persuasive arguments for wilderness protection: 1) the innate worth of wilderness, a value irrelevant to the use, or even the existence, of humans. 2) the potential for a relationship of
participation and holism between the human and the non-human and a breaking down of that powerful binary.

Muir’s Ethical Extension

Despite Muir’s utilitarian arguments in the Hetch Hetchy debate, it is clear from the larger body of his writings that he had accepted and had begun to articulate a theory of the intrinsic value of nature more than a century before Deep Ecologists, such as Arne Naess, began to do so in the 1970’s. As we have already seen, Muir’s position was essentially theological. He believed that a perfect Creator must have created a perfect creation, and he cursed “the barbarous notion [that] is almost universally entertained by civilized man, that there is in all the manufactures of Nature something essentially coarse which can and must be eradicated by human culture” (Steep Trails 4). He also clearly held that this perfection was irrelevant to whether or not it was perceived by humans: “How many caves and fountains that no eye has yet seen lie with all their fine furniture down in the darkness, and how many shy wild creatures are at home beneath the grateful lights and shadows of the woods, rejoicing in their fullness of perfect life” (Steep Trails 37). We have seen before that Muir’s extension of worth to the non-human was not only irrelevant to its usefulness to humans, but irrelevant even to its danger to humans: “Again and again, in season and out of season, the question comes up, ‘What are rattlesnakes good for?’ As if nothing that does not obviously make for the benefit of man had any right to exist; as if our ways were God’s ways... anyhow they are all, head and tail, good for themselves, and we need not begrudge them their share of life” (Our National Parks

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64), and, of poison ivy, he writes, “like most other things not apparently useful to man, it has few friends, and the blind question, ‘Why was it made?’ goes on and on with never a guess that first of all it might have been made for itself” (First Summer 26). As one writer puts it, “Muir’s church was the most catholic of all, welcoming all life into its fold” (Smith 764). And one should keep in mind that for Muir, rocks, rivers, wind, and the planets and stars were all alive and worshipping God.

While Max Oelschlager is correct in arguing that Muir never formulated a complete and systematic philosophical system, and that his “insights must be sifted out line by line” (173), Oelschlager is also correct in pointing out that Muir provided an “alternative vocabulary” for talking about wilderness (192). It was precisely this vocabulary, and its attendant mythos, that was missing in the Hetch Hetchy debate. By granting intrinsic value to nature, Muir extended ethics to include all nature. As Burke puts it, “We ethicize something when we act towards it as though it were an intrinsic good” (Permanence 304). This ethical appreciation of Hetch Hetchy is conspicuously scarce in the public debate.

Roderick Nash argues that “From the perspective of intellectual history, environmental ethics is revolutionary; it is arguably the greatest expansion of morality in the course of human thought” (Rights 7). Clearly, Muir was one of the first of these revolutionaries. Muir insisted that “No dogma taught by the present civilization seems to form so insuperable an obstacle in the way of a right understanding of the relations which culture sustains to wildness as that which regards the world as made especially for the uses of man. Every animal, plant, and crystal controverts it in the plainest terms” (Steep
Nash says, “I take to be one of the most remarkable ideas of our time: the belief that ethical standing does not begin and end with human beings” (Rights xi). A contemporary of Muir, Henry Fairfield Osborne, the founder and President of the American Museum of Natural History, perhaps put it most simply: “Muir wrote about trees as no one else in the whole history of trees, chiefly because he loved them as he loved men and women” (Brooks 24).

Muir’s Holism

Perhaps even more important than his extension of ethical standing, Muir’s wilderness mythos offers the promise of an erasure between the (to many contemporary environmentalists, pernicious) binary of human/non-human. This promise is more complicated than his extension of ethical consideration because Muir himself never quite lived up to his ideal, and, in fact, some aspects of his philosophy, as I demonstrate below, actively reified that very binary. Many intellectual historians hold that the human/non-human binary, which has been around in some form since the first human thought, correctly or not, “I am this; I am not that,” became especially prominent through the spread of Christianity and became even more prevalent with the Scientific Revolution. Donald Worster argues that “The precise contribution of the Christian faith was that it severed man from nature emotionally. Therein lay the seed for the development of the rational objectivity that characterizes modern science, the notion that knowledge requires a strict repression of the viewer’s subjective feelings about the object being studied” (Worster 28).
And, Morris Berman is just one of many scholars who holds that previous to the
Scientific Revolution,

Rocks, rivers, and clouds were all seen as wondrous, alive, and human
beings felt at home in this environment. The cosmos in short was a place
of belonging. A member of the cosmos was not an alienated observer of it
but a direct participant in its drama. His personal destiny was bound up
with its destiny, and this relationship gave meaning to his life. This type of
consciousness—what I shall refer to in this book as ‘participating
consciousness’—involves merger, or identification, with one’s
surroundings, and bespeaks a psychic wholeness that has long since
passed from the scene. (Berman 16)

John Muir tried in much of his life and writing to regain this “participating
consciousness.” Although “the quest for objectivity... meant that the outer physical
world was to be kept firmly separated from all religious experience... [and] science was
laying claim to nature, warning the pious to go elsewhere for their inspiration” (Worster
90), Muir spurned these warnings and looked precisely at nature as a path for spiritual
reconnection with the cosmos. Berman holds that “the history of the West, according to
both the sociologist and the poet, is the progressive removal of mind, or spirit, from
phenomenal appearances” (Berman 69). Oelschlager posits that Muir appreciated the
fact that “all organic being is intertwined into a living whole apart from which the
existence of any single organism or species is not possible,” and that Muir’s
apprehension of this fact “was revolutionary, well in advance of the conventional
wisdom” (184).

This sense of oneness is pervasive throughout Muir’s writing and, at times, his
apprehension of cosmic unity was ecstatic. “Everything is so inseparably united. As soon
as one begins to describe a flower or a tree or a storm or an Indian or a chipmunk, up
jumps the whole heavens and earth and God himself in one inseparable glory." (Wolfe
171). As Muir entered the foothills of the Sierras he used a second-person voice to say,
"You bathe in these spirit beams [from the distant Sierras], turning round and round as if
warming at a camp-fire. Presently you lose consciousness of your own separate
existence: you blend with the landscape and become part and parcel of nature" (Walk
211). In a letter to a friend, dated June 9, 1872, he complains to her, "You say that good
men are 'nearer to the heart of God than are woods and fields, rocks and waters.' Such
distinctions and measurements seem strange to me. Rocks and waters, etc., are words of
God and so are men. We all flow from one fountain Soul. All are expressions of one
love" (Bade 332). One of Muir’s most quoted quotes gets right to heart of the matter:
"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the
universe" (First Summer 157).

While Muir’s philosophy, or, more properly, theology, held the promise of true
integration of the human and the non-human, his faith, ultimately, was misanthropic. I
reproduce a lengthy passage here to illustrate:

Think of the millions of squabs that preaching, praying men and women
kill and eat, with all sorts of other animals great and small, young and old,
while eloquently discoursing on the coming of the blessed peaceful,
血less millennium. Think of the passenger pigeons that fifty or sixty
years ago filled the woods and sky over half the continent, now
exterminated by beating down the young from the nests together with the
brooding parents, before they could try their wonderful wings; by trapping
them in nets, feeding them to hogs, etc. None of our fellow mortals is safe
who eats what we eat, who in any way interferes with our pleasures, or
who may be used for work or food, clothing or ornament, or mere cruel,
sportish amusement. Fortunately many are too small to be seen, and therefore enjoy life beyond our reach. And in looking through God's great stone books reaching back millions and millions of years, it is a great comfort to learn that vast multitudes of creatures, great and small and infinite in number, lived and had a good time in God's love before man was created. (*My Boyhood* 83-84)

The significance of this passage lies in the fact that while Muir could gracefully incorporate natural destruction, and even predation, into his "one big Word of Love," human participation in the world is always and, seemingly inherently, evil. Even our needs for food, clothing, and work are innately pernicious. The last sentence of this passage clearly reveals that Muir's true Edenic Garden is nature without humans. Muir's glimpses of holism and integration are ultimately frustrated by his conviction that humans are sin.

William Cronon elaborates on the consequences of such a view:

This, then, is the central paradox: wilderness offers a dualistic vision in which the human is entirely outside the natural... The place where we are is the place where nature is not. If this is so—if by definition wilderness leaves no place for human beings, save perhaps as contemplative sojourners enjoying their leisurely reverie in God's natural cathedral—then also by definition it can offer no solution to the environmental and other problems that confront us. (81)

While Muir never fully achieved a consistent holistic, participatory philosophy, he did go further in that direction than, perhaps, any other American of his time, but such a perspective was never even offered in the Hetch Hetchy debate; neither was any committed insistence on the innate value of the valley as wilderness. I am not arguing that if the Preservationists had stayed within their own mythos that the valley would have
been saved; one could only speculate. But Hetch Hetchy's fate as a flooded valley was
sealed when the Preservationists failed to argue that the valley had value in and of itself
or that humans might be capable of having a relationship with it not based on its utility.
Donna Haraway has said that "struggles over what will count as rational accounts of the
world are struggles over how to see" (Simians 194). Preservationists failed in the Hetch
Hetchy debate to offer an alternative vision of our world and our place in it

Hetch Hetchy is not, however, the end of the story. In fact, it might be seen as
just the first chapter. While Hetch Hetchy was a defeat for wilderness preservation,
subsequent fights have often been won by Preservationists. In 1916, the National Park
Service was created within the Department of the Interior (not the Department of
Agriculture like Pinchot's Forest Service). While preservation efforts within the parks
are on-going and often contentious, there is more designated wilderness within the parks
today than ever before. In 1935, the Wilderness Society was formed with the mission of
"fighting off invasion of the wilderness and of stimulating . . . an appreciation of its
multiform emotional, intellectual, and scientific values (Nash 207).

Perhaps most significantly, in 1964, thirty years of effort by Robert Marshall,
Howard Zahniser and others in the Wilderness Society resulted in the Wilderness Act;
this act provided for a National Wilderness Preservation System to create and administer
protected wilderness areas in perpetuity. While no true Preservationist is completely
happy with any of the wilderness laws and much wilderness land has been lost since
Hetch Hetchy was dammed, the important point is that the Preservationist movement is
stronger than ever, and it is having direct and powerful influence on federal, state, and
local issues concerning wilderness. One of the most notable and at least partly successful recent efforts has been in wetland (and other “micro-wilderness” preservation and reclamation). While it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, to trace the use of mythos in these twentieth century achievements, I can note that such notions as “intrinsic worth” and “wilderness experience” (a variant of participatory consciousness) have become bywords of the preservationist cause. A Preservationist mythos, available to but not used by opponents of the Hetch Hetchy dam, now plays a profound role in wilderness preservation.

My point here is not that the preservationists of an earlier era lost Hetch Hetchy because they failed to effectively invoke their own mythic arguments. Quite likely, the valley would have been dammed anyway, even if the preservationists had used the very best means of persuasion available to them. I argue that, regardless of the legislative outcome, preservationist arguments were inconsistent, and ultimately untenable because of their mythic dissonance. Preservationists perceived the rhetorical situation through the myth of the holy Garden-Temple. Their passionate defense of the valley was grounded in the belief that they were defending sacred land, land which was sacred because of the almost complete absence of human activity upon it. The preservationists’ representation of the situation to its audience, however, was based on the myth of the Working Garden, the Garden made perfect by human intervention. While perceiving the exigence of the situation through the myth of the Garden-Temple, Preservationists represented the remedy to the exigence through the myth of the Working Garden.
My argument, as set forth in Chapter 1, holds that rhetorical situations, while constraining and influencing the decisions made by the rhetors involved, are not determinate. Rhetors have real and effective (though not, as Vatz suggests, unlimited) agency to resist, modify, and reconstruct rhetorical situations. While the material conditions of any given situation may, as Bitzer holds, be factual and located in reality, our perception of the facts are always colored by the mythic understandings we bring to those facts. This feature of discourse grants considerable power and responsibility to the rhetors engaged in creating arguments. Audiences’ perceptions of rhetorical situations are, in large part, phenomenological; although they are not, as Vatz would have it, radically subjective. Carolyn Miller is correct in holding that rhetorical situations are social phenomenon, and my research in this dissertation supports a view of situations as socially constructed elements of discourse. Consequently, rhetors have significant agency in shaping audiences’ perceptions of situation. I suggest in Chapter 1 that our identification with rhetorical communities and the mythic orientations shared within those communities have a profound impact upon the ways in which we perceive reality. I believe that the subsequent chapters have supported this claim through my analysis of two rhetorical communities and their mythoi.

The power of the Conservationist mythos from 1906-1913 was immense and its influence in shaping the rhetorical situation of Hetch Hetchy was profound. The Preservationist mythos, however, as the preceding chapters illustrate, was also highly suasive. For a variety of socio-historical reasons, many Americans at the turn of the century identified with the myth of the wilderness Garden-Temple. By not offering a
remedy to the exigence based on this mythic identification, Preservationists failed to tap into a deep source of support for the preservation of Hetch Hetchy—whether that source was deep enough to save Hetch Hetchy is not the salient point. I argue only that an auditor’s identification within a rhetorical community is determined primarily through his or her greater or lesser identification with that community’s mythos, and Preservationists failed to provide a cohesive mythic basis for the preservation of Hetch Hetchy. According to Hart, myths “explain what makes a cultural grouping special, and thus foster community identity” (318), by acceding to a utilitarian interpretation of the proper remedy to the exigence, the Preservationist community lost coherence and unity, thus allowing the Conservationists to instruct the total audience in its choices of action.

This dissertation has been pre-occupied with wilderness as a human cultural construct, as a topic of rhetoric. I have argued that the wilderness that we know is largely constructed through the language we use to talk about it. Constructing wilderness as a Garden-Temple effectively invokes an ancient and pervasive human myth about a prior age of human interconnectivity with the cosmos, our loss of that mystical union, and the promise, or at least possibility, of a return, a reconnection. However, as illustrated through Muir’s own wilderness ethics, this mythic orientation carries with it some problematic implications. If we divide the mythic narrative into three terms: 1) Edenic Unity/Perfection 2) The Fall 3) a Return, we can locate much of Muir’s, and Preservationists’ in general, misanthropy in the middle term of the narrative. As fallen creatures, humans are outside of perfect nature, we are unnatural. If wilderness is seen as pure nature, we are necessarily intruders in the wild.
The first and third terms of the mythic structure provide powerful motives for wilderness preservation. An understanding of wilderness as Source or, in mythological terms, as world-navel, a place to return to find truer selves, apart from all our things—this understanding can and has provided an effective impetus for wilderness preservation. We must seriously consider our interpretations of the second term, however. The idea of the Fall is obviously a crucial (in fact, central) term in the myth and we cannot just dismiss it because it mutes up our environmental ethics. We can, however, become more aware of how this crucial part of the myth impacts our ethical responses to wilderness, and this dissertation has been an effort to demonstrate that impact.

Myths persist over vast reaches of time and we cannot simply decide to rewrite them and all agree to follow the new understanding, but as rhetors and rhetorical critics we can pay attention to the ways in which we deploy myths in our arguments, and we must be conscious of the unwarranted assumptions that inhere in any mythic orientation. Although myths cannot be simply rewritten, they are amenable to modification. The contemporary environmental movement must seriously consider the ethical, and even metaphysical, implications of the Fall within the *mythos* of the wilderness Garden-Temple. Can we imagine wilderness as Source and our experiences in it as Return without accepting the misanthropic entanglements of John Muir’s *mythos*? Can the myth of the Garden-Temple be recuperated in the service of a wilderness philosophy that allows for human integration into rather than separation from the rest of creation? Can the Garden-Temple be reconciled with the Working Garden; can we escape the either/or of the Conservationist and Preservationist perspectives? These questions must
be addressed if wilderness preservation is to retain adherents in a world of dwindling resources and exponential population growth. This dissertation has attempted to show the consequences of our mythic orientations towards wilderness. Wilderness contains the our dreams of a lost past, our fears about our present course, and our desires for a cosmic reconnection. We will always respond to wilderness mythically, for wilderness itself is a mythic term. Rhetorical critics must be aware of this dimension; I hope this dissertation has furthered this awareness.


