The Changing Nature of our Return to Nature

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Abstract

Over the course of time, creative individuals have been attracted to the idea of self-fulfillment and self-awareness through acts of solitude. Writers, specifically, have discovered their voices by isolating themselves from society, but as times change so does the manner and magnitude in which they willingly choose to escape their daily lives. In the past, men (primarily) returned to nature as an outlet for their rustic interests and passions; however, that need is still present with the overcrowded and industrialized world we live in today. Many pieces of literature give specific accounts of creative inspiration through societal isolation, such as Thoreau's classic experience at Walden Pond. My research differs in that it is comprised of both historic and recent accounts of similar experiences, while being attentive to the issues of gender and time. This project includes an academic paper along with a creative piece that records my modern day experience in solitude.

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Also, please visit **http://tinyurl.com/cmqgd24** to view the photo book I created to accompany this project. I took all of the included photographs during my experiences in nature.

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I. A Survey of Solitude in Nature

Over the course of time, people have been attracted to the idea of self-fulfillment through solitude. As times have changed, so has the manner and magnitude in which people have willingly chosen to escape from their daily lives. Interestingly, people tend to seek nature as the location for these so-called rituals or retreats. For many, moving away from society and towards nature results in creative inspiration. It can also lead to insights of self-awareness and recognition. Research shows that despite differences for how and why people choose to remove themselves from society (if it is indeed chosen and not unwilled) there are patterns that indicate a shared desire among people throughout history. By examining several preindustrial men, contemporaries, and women who have creatively expressed and shared their fictional, experiential and historical stories of solitude, we see the changing nature of mans continuous return to nature.

The preindustrial age occurred from the beginning of time to approximately 1750 when the industrial revolution began. An early account of man seeking solitude goes back to the time before Christ. Euripides, who was born in 480 B.C., later sought solitude in a cave on Salamis near Athens in which he wrote (x). What this shows is that people have sought solitude for as long as history has been recorded. While time usually leads to change, this draw from society and towards solitude remains. However, there are noticeable differences in the patterns of solitude over history. For example, as apparent in David Howarth's novel, *1066 The Year of the Conquest,* isolation was a common way of living in the past and did not need to be sought. "In trying to recall that life, the most striking thing, especially to a modern Englishman, is its

isolation" (12). The village in this book serves as the center and entirety of all that is necessary. There was no need to travel outside of the village. "With such an outlook, the village must have had an intense quality of homeliness that only the simplest people can experience" (13). This scene is very different today though in that it is difficult to evoke the inherent sounds of nature that are still apparent but often go unrecognized (15). So, while the people of Horstede were isolated from each other due to distance between villages, they were not similarly isolated from the natural world (21). Howarth comments on how society's relationship to nature differs today. He says, "In modern terms, it is said a man's happiness largely depends on whether he feels he can understand and control his own environment; and in that respect the people of Horstede were certainly much better off than their industrialized descendants, either in England or elsewhere in the world" (25). This quote calls into question the effects of industrialization. While the people of Horstede were exposed to natural disasters and diseases, they had a strong relationship with God and nature in which they trusted. Similarly, one of the reasons people seek isolation today is to rekindle the relationship between the individual, God and the natural world.

Keith Thomas's *Man and the Natural World* discusses how man's relationship with nature has changed, specifically focusing on the years 1500 to 1800. Many people believed [and still believe today] that "nature existed solely to serve man's interests" (17). This selfish way of thinking led men to believe that humans were superior to animals, although merely animals themselves. The woods, therefore, were homes for animals, not men. Poet William Brown says that as a result, men who live in the wilderness are "rough and barbarous" (quoted in Thomas 194-195). This preconceived notion or stereotype is still somewhat true today. Consider the people who isolate themselves from society today, such as hermits. They are unlike others in that they lack interpersonal skills and simply prefer to be alone. But to many, solitude within the

country offers “an escape from urban vices and affections, a rest from the strains of business, and a refuge from the dirt, smoke and noise of the city” (247). Townspeople even considered the country to be a sort of escape—“to be seen as the place for relaxation and refreshment” (247). Sure, one’s attitude toward solitude certainly differs, but for many, serves as a setting for spiritual renewal (259). “‘The farther I ascend from animated nature, from men and cattle and the common birds of the woods and fields,’ wrote Coleridge in 1803 after climbing the Kirkstone Pass in a storm, ‘the greater becomes in me the intensity of the feeling of life . . . God is everywhere’” (261). Here, Coleridge claims that he feels alive both spiritually and physically in the presence of nature. Thomas questions why “the pull of wild nature can always be recognized as an essentially anti-social emotion” (268). So, we are reintroduced to the idea that loneliness is a vice, a “human misfortune” (268). However, with the passing of time came the idea that perhaps there were reasons for solitude besides religious contemplation and that loneliness maybe is not such a bad thing. “‘To man by nature,’ Thomas Hobbes would write, ‘solitude is an enemy.’ Only the religious contemplative sought the desert. But in the Elizabethan age the humanist cult of the individual fostered the idea that temporary withdrawal from society could be positively pleasurable” (268). This quote shows that people are no longer only associating human happiness with their relationships with others. Finally, in the nineteenth century nature is seen as “an escape from the increasing bustle of the cities and the factories” (268). As a result, there are becoming more reasons for solitude than its intended purpose. John Stuart Mill states:

> ‘Solitude, in the sense of being often alone,’ he declared, ‘was indispensable for human fulfillment. It was essential to any depth of meditation or of character . . . Solitude in the presence of natural beauty and grandeur is the cradle of thoughts

> and aspirations which are not only good for the individual, but which society could ill do without.' (quoted in Thomas, 268)

Here, it is evident that solitude is not only preferred, it is necessary for the individual; furthermore, it is good for not just the individual, but for humanity as a whole.

It is important to recognize classic pieces of fiction that were written based on the same ideas of solitude and wisdom. James Hilton's *Lost Horizon* causes readers to question many of the same things that still cannot be answered today. While attempting to escape a civil war, four people are kidnapped and taken to a monastery. This idea is interesting in that it examines the difference between forced and voluntary seclusion. The monastery they are taken to represents a world very different from the doomed reality of today's "unhumanized" world" (42). One of the characters discusses the isolation he feels as he realizes he is without food (51). The word isolation here has a negative connotation when compared with the more positive word, solitude. Later in the novel, the Chinese admit that this is not a traveled part of the world and that "A separate culture might flourish here without contamination from the outside world" (73). Again, one cannot ignore the negative connotation associated with the word contamination which implies that humans corrupt the earth they inhabit. Mrs. Brinklow, another character in the book, inquires about what exactly the lamas do. "They devote themselves, madam, to contemplation and the pursuit of wisdom" (101). When the response is then that they do nothing, readers are left to consider the value of the pursuit of knowledge. The following excerpt from the book discusses both the costs and conveniences of solitude:

> Yet it is, nevertheless, a prospect of much charm that I unfold for you—long tranquilities during which you will observe a sunset as men in the outer world hear the striking of a clock, and with far less care. The years will come and go,

> and you will pass from fleshly enjoyments into austere but no less satisfying realms; you may lose the keenness of muscle and appetite, but there will be gain to match your loss; you will achieve calmness and profundity, ripeness and wisdom, and the clear enchantment of memory. And, most precious of all, you will have Time—that rare and lovely gift that your Western countries have lost the more they have pursued it. Think for a moment. You will have time to read—never again will you skim pages to save minutes or avoid some study lest it prove too engrossing. You have also a taste for music—here, then, are your scores and instruments, with Time, unruffled and unmeasured to give you their richest savor. And you are also, we will say, a man of serene friendships, a long and kindly traffic of the mind from which death may not call you away with his customary hurry? Or, if it is solitude that you prefer, could you not employ our pavilions to enrich the gentleness of lonely thoughts? (160-161)

The book, obviously, does not describe actual events but it does illustrate the sort of influence solitude can have on individuals. For example, the monastery in this book is not ordinary (169); however, many monks really do seek solitude in monasteries. This book also challenges what might be considered valuable in how we spend our time. For example, Chang says, "It is significant that the English regard slackness as a vice. We, on the other hand, should vastly prefer it to tension" (175). Why do people spend time alone and what are the affects? "But whatever the past might yield, he was discovering happiness in the present. When he sat reading in the library, or playing Mozart in the music room, he often felt the invasion of a deep spiritual emotion" (178). Reading is primarily an act of solitude, but this is something that all artists, whether painters, writers, or musicians share. Towards the end of the novel, the characters begin

to realize the difference between isolation, solitude, seclusion and captivity. "*Escape?* Is that *really* the word that should be used? After all, the pass is open to any one at any time. We have no jailers, save those that Nature herself has provided" (192). The truth is this book discusses a place that may be considered extraordinary. "Think of all that we've actually seen, both of us—a lost valley in the midst of unexplored mountains, a monastery with a library of European books—" (217). However, there is nothing more extraordinary than what exists as nature. Before focusing on specific people who have devoted at least part of their lives to solitude, let's examine this fascinating endeavor from a broader perspective. It seems that there exists a correlation between the arts and those who are attracted to solitude.

Anthony Storr, author of *Solitude: a Return to the Self,* acknowledges how creative individuals such as poets, composers, novelists, painters, et cetera spend a great deal of time on their own, which contradicts the wide spread idea that human relationships are the key to happiness. Thus, the question he encourages readers to ask is whether or not creative individuals choose solitude because they thrive in it, or whether their awkward interpersonal relationship skills force them into solitude. It is important not to draw a correlation between creative individuals isolating themselves *instead of* forming interpersonal relationships (xiii-xiv). Even though relationships are viewed as being vital to human happiness in today's society, Storr says that importance of interpersonal relationships is a recent phenomenon, which is to say that turning to solitude in the preindustrial age would have been more natural and common than it is viewed today. However, Storr also says how the opposite seems to be true for creative individuals. So, is it merely coincidence then that many of the greatest minds never married? According to Storr, "Creative talent of a major kind is not widely bestowed. Those who possess it are often regarded with awe and envy because of their gifts. They also tend to be thought of as

peculiar; odd human beings who do not share the pains and pleasures of the average person" (ix). Furthermore, they often tend to be more "alienated" and concerned with themselves than with the welfare of other people (xiv). Storr makes an interesting point at the end of the introduction. He says that perhaps creative individuals share the same thoughts as everyone else and that they just express it through the work they produce. According to Storr, the more connected with himself a man is (which he can acquire through solitude), the closer he will become to reaching his full potential as an individual (28). "Removing oneself voluntarily from one's habitual environment promotes self-understanding and contact with those inner depths of being which elude one in the hurly-burly of day-to-day life" (35). The truth is spending time alone is valuable because it allows people to come into contact with their deepest feelings. Humans, unlike other creatures, are imaginative creatures; as a result, humans have what Samuel Johnson calls "the hunger of imagination" (64). Individuals differ in interests, hobbies, even priorities. What Storr is getting at here is that creative individuals are often simply more concerned with their work than interpersonal relationships (74). "Many creative people appear to nurture their talents more carefully than they do their personal relationships" (75).

Storr says that often, adults who have difficulty forming relationships with other adults tend to have an easier time forming relationships with children or animals (112). Storr uses the example of Beatrix Potter, author of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit.* Potter kept a secret journal in which she wrote in code. She had a lonely childhood, didn't attend school, didn't have house guests, and no close relationship with her family. However, Potter was particularly interested in nature and animals. Margaret Lane who wrote a biography on her said, "She had made friends with rabbits and hedgehogs, mice and minnows, as a prisoner in solitary confinement will befriends a mouse" (110). Annie Carter taught Potter German, and when she married, Potter

continued to talk with her and her children. Potter entertained her son, Noel, by sending him an illustrated letter which eventually came to be *The Tale of Peter Rabbit.*

Storr states, "People often express the idea that they are most themselves when they are alone; . . . They forget that art is communication, and that, implicitly or explicitly, the work which they produce in solitude is aimed at somebody" (147). As a result, when one writes in solitude, is he really in solitude as his writing is aimed at a future audience? In addition, geniuses tend to be perfectionists. "No highly creative person is ever satisfied with what he has done. Often indeed, after completing a project, he experiences a period of depression from which he is only relieved by embarking on the next piece of work. It seems to me that the capacity to create provides an irreplaceable opportunity for *personal development in isolation"* (154). Perhaps this is why some authors develop characters that are similar to themselves. "Many writers have described how characters which they have invented seem to take on an independent life of their own" (198). While student teaching this semester, I had students create author projects where they researched and wrote about a specific classic American author. Students wrote a final paper on their authors on a topic of their choosing, however, many students wrote about how their author was similar to a main character in the book, which supports Storrs claim.

In conclusion, solitude is a way for creative individuals to "find meaning in their lives" (202). He refers to a quote from Edward Gibbon, "Conversation enriches the understanding, but solitude is the school of genius; and the uniformity of a work denotes the hand of a single artist" (ix). Thus, while people may learn a lot from one another, they are more deeply connected with truth and their inner thoughts, and more able to express themselves in solitude. Combined with creativity is the need to seek our true identity. Storr says

> The creative person is constantly seeking to discover himself, to remodel his own identity and to find meaning in the universe through what he creates . . . His most significant moments are those in which he attains some new insight, or makes some new discovery; and these moments are chiefly, if not invariably, those in which he is alone. (xiv)

The purpose of art is self-expression. Through writing, composing, painting, et cetera people hope to make some sort of discovery about themselves if not about the larger world as a whole. Aside from performing acts of creativity, consider times in which people are alone such as sleep and prayer. Storr gives the example of how some people will wake up from their slumber having made some sort of discovery (22). Thus, it can be stated that the brain functions best in solitude. But where lays the connection between solitude and nature? Frank Stewart, author of *A Natural History of Nature Writing* says "When we look at nature . . . we are looking mainly at ourselves" (xvi). Thus our turn to nature depicts our desire to seek identity and to bring together the human and natural worlds. This idea is drawn from the literary and philosophical movement, transcendentalism, which several writers were associated with. With this movement, which occurred during the 1800's during the industrial revolution, there was a concentration on simplicity and the self, the intellect and the mind, and on faith. It was not unnatural for transcendentalists to isolate themselves from society in order to seek a deep, spiritual connection with the earth. Two of the most known transcendentalists are Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau.

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) believed in a strong connection between the individual, the intellect and nature. In his essay, "Nature," he discusses man's relationship to the natural world. "All that is separate from us, all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME,

that is, both nature and art, all other men and my own body, must be ranked under this name, NATURE" (16). Here, he draws a connection and simultaneously makes a distinction between nature and art. Emerson also narrows the definition of solitude by getting to the core of what it is really about. "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me" (17). Emerson is defining solitude in several different ways here. He is saying that not only must one be alone, but he must not be in the comfort of his own home either. Reading and writing are not examples of solitude because it occurs within the home and is a sort of conversation. Emerson touches on the concept of aesthetics in that he says very few men, other than the poet, are able to really see the beauty of nature (18). "To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature . . . The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. . . . The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood" (18). Think about how creative children are. The difference between children and men, he says, is that children do not just see, they feel. Nature is not just beautiful to the eye but something that also speaks to the heart. The rationale he provides for creative individuals to move towards nature is not much different from the beliefs of his prodigy, Henry David Thoreau. "Yet it is certain that the power to produce this delight does not reside in nature, but in man or in a harmony of both" (19). Without man, nature is not appreciated; thus, nature's ability to provide happiness to man is dependent upon both man and nature. This is similar to how art is dependent upon man to create, but that man is dependent upon a beauty that inspires him. "The poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point, and each in his several works to satisfy the love of beauty which stimulates him to produce" (26). Nature is just one example of

this inspiration. Emerson also discusses nature and solitude, focusing more specifically on the creative individual in his work titled *The American Scholar*. "There goes in the world a notion that the scholar should be a recluse" (89). And indeed, many scholars are. He elaborates on scholars saying, "In the long period of his preparation he must betray often an ignorance and shiftlessness in popular arts, incurring the disdain of the able who shoulder him aside. . . . Worse yet, he must accept—how often!—poverty and solitude" (92). First, this quote gives explanation to why scholars are different, which is because they are expected to ignore and even go against popular culture. Furthermore, Emerson is brutally honest in saying that the scholar is poor in wealth (but rich in thought), and that it requires some degree of loneliness perhaps from being misunderstood, but also from the solitude required to produce work. One of Emerson's most compelling arguments is that the poet expresses truths that all people experience. "The poet, in utter solitude remembering his spontaneous thoughts and recording them, is found to have recorded that which men in crowded cities find true for them also" (93). That which the poet feels is not different from what anybody feels, it is simply that the poet has a talent for expressing his thoughts in words. Lastly, in his work titled *Self-Reliance,* Emerson again attempts to figure out the essence of solitude by providing yet another definition. He proclaims, "It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude" (153). The idea of man maintaining the independence of solitude among a crowd shows that solitude is more than a physical state but also a state of mind.

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862), a transcendentalist like Emerson, is known as "the originator of nature writing in America" (Stewart xx). Nature writers are passionate about animals, nature, and preservation and seek to discover how to live alongside all that is natural.

According to Frank Stewart's *A Natural History of Nature Writing*, nature writers believe that without this deep interconnectedness with nature, the human soul is lacking and unfulfilled (xvi). In addition, nature writers believe that in order to understand nature, one must experience it. They often express themselves and their experiences in nature through writing and poetry, journaling and photography, to capture not just elements of nature but their interaction with it. The beauty of nature writing is that only through the core of nature and simplicity is one so honestly faced with self-discovery, truth, spirituality, inner-peace, purpose, wisdom and reflection. "We have not really understood the work of any of these writers unless we allow for the authenticity of certain deeply transforming moments in their experiences, located in specific environments" (Stewart 226). With this quote, Stewart is saying that one cannot truly understand a writer's work without having experienced the context in which it was written. This idea is similar to why I wanted to experience the effects of solitude on creative inspiration because I believed I would have a better understanding of it only if I experienced it for myself rather than relying solely on books. Finally, "Thoreau noted in his journal, in a moment of bliss, 'A writer is the scribe of all nature—he is the corn & the grass & the atmosphere writing'" (quoted in Stewart 233). This definition, too, is an essential part of what we mean by nature writing.

Thoreau, the originator of nature writing, is most renowned for building a cabin on Walden Pond just miles from his mentor, Emerson's home. He spent a little over two years in this cabin writing his book, *Walden* which depicts his devotion of and curiosity for the inherent beauty of the natural world. In a passage of *Walden*, Thoreau explains what he sought through his experience at Walden Pond. He says, "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived" (*Walden*, "Life in the Woods").

Thoreau chose solitude in order to learn what it was that life had to teach him. It was through this solitude that Thoreau was inspired to write *Walden.* Like many others who are drawn towards solitude, Thoreau went through a dark period in his life. Thoreau turned away from society and towards nature when his brother passed when Thoreau was just twenty-four years old. It often is not received well when one prefers animals to people. For example, John Burroughs says, "'if it had been a man or a woman he had met' instead of a skunk . . . Thoreau 'would have run the other way'" (quoted in Stewart 71). Perhaps man's relationship to animals is something some people have difficulty understanding like man's relationship to nature. Interestingly, Thoreau, even during his time, recognized the destructiveness of industrialization. While it has advanced society in so many ways, it has hindered our relationship with the earth and threatened the wholesome and simplistic way of life that humans were put on this land to live. The more advanced the world becomes, the greater the need to escape the hustle and bustle. Essayist Bill McKibben makes the sad realization that soon Thoreau's writings of nature will be as foreign as the cave paintings are to us (quoted in Stewart 218). As a result, writers are remaining in their offices and distancing themselves from the outside world, which hurts the subject and quality of the literature they produce (221). In other words, it makes the work inauthentic because it lacks the experience that Thoreau claims is necessary in the creative process.

John Muir (1838-1914), another friend of Emerson, had many titles including that of a naturalist, spiritualist, preservationist, ecologist, and more. Unfortunately, Muir had little money to support his solitary explorations (Stewart 118). He differs from Emerson and Thoreau in that he favored direct experience over the hard labor of writing (Stewart 122). In fact, Muir's relationship with writing was more obligatory than inspired:

> Despite his love of solitude and wilderness, Muir found it increasingly difficult to remain in the mountains and do the writing that now seemed to him his obligation to society and his destiny: writing that would 'entire people to look at Nature's loveliness' and to understand the soul-healing importance of the wild. (quoted in Stewart 123)

Thus, either the creative act minimized the value of Muir's relationship with nature as he began to view his method of escapism as work, or he only implied the need he felt to use his writing to inform people of nature's beauty. Muir's writings, like Emerson's, depict his relationship with nature as being spiritual. More specifically, religion is deeply rooted in his view of nature in that both cleanse and purify the soul. While religion certainly has its place in transcendentalism, it becomes more central in Muir's writings. Muir's works focus less on the creative inspiration that is born out of solitude and reflects more on the inherent wonders and ideals of nature.

Conclusively, the writers mentioned thus far recognized the role solitude and nature plays in the lives of creators. Why is it that some people can see the beauty in nature and others seem oblivious that it even exists? I remember during my experience, I felt that very few in the world could even understand the joy of what I was experiencing and I did not understand why. According to Stewart, this can be described as aesthetics, the awareness of and ability to see and appreciate nature. Donald Worster explains it by saying that when one tries to make sense of nature, that sense of appreciation is lost. In other words, one should not allow his or her eyes to overanalyze nature:

> When the aesthetic awareness is well developed, on the other hand, one sees easily and surely the deeper harmony within, and the pleasure it affords is intense. Words like 'beauty' and 'integrity' come readily to mind. Indeed, such qualities

> become the most significant realities that exist and their perception and enjoyment is the highest form of living (Stewart 156).

Thoreau shared these same beliefs. He said that in order to understand nature it is essential to "let science slide" (quoted in Stewart 231). It is interesting that people felt compelled to escape from their daily lives even before the effects of the industrial revolution which later drove people further away from nature. Although the works of Emerson, Thoreau and Muir do not depict a fear of nature, it is apparent that those before their time probably would have been afraid of the unknown, of rabid animals and savage natives of the woods. While this fear dissipates as we examine post-industrial writers, we will return to an anxiety of nature later. For now, let's examine the post-industrial period as well as take a look at specific writers from this time.

The industrial revolution occurred roughly between 1750 and 1850, thus the postindustrial time period refers to the years after. The industrial revolution marks a period of economical and social growth and advancement. Society thrived with new inventions that improved the overall quality of life. The industrial revolution gave people hope for a prosperous future. While some people got caught up in the new and improved lifestyle this period offered, others found themselves looking back and reminiscing on past ideals. Yet, as the world continued to develop and evolve, people started turning their backs on the simple life they had come from.

Aldo Leopold's (1887- 1948) *A Sand County Almanac* is comparable to *Walden* in many ways. Leopold too was very literal with his work in that he "disliked 'nature lovers' who stuck to the paths, got their nature from books, and wrote 'bad verse on birch bark'" (Stewart 155). He claims that by combining science with art, writers have the ability to change how people view the value of nature (Stewart 153). Leopold is like Muir in that he too is known as an ecologist,

environmentalist, and preservationist, and that there are ethical and philosophical undertones apparent in *A Sand County Almanac*. Like Thoreau, Leopold captured beautiful photographs of nature that visually depicted the beauty he conveyed in his writing. However, rather than discuss the relationship between solitude and creative inspiration, Leopold urges readers to take care of and preserve the universe. He discusses in *A Sand County Almanac* how civilization has become cluttered. "We fancy that industry supports us, forgetting what supports industry" (178). Perhaps Leopold was able to see what he thought the industrial revolution might (and what it would eventually) do to jeopardize mans' relationship with nature. Leopold strongly believes in creating harmony between man and land, and also about educating him on conservation, two very difficult tasks. Interestingly, Thoreau emphasized what nature could teach him while Leopold here emphasizes the opposite, a lack of education on the importance of conservation. But then Leopold makes a good point about interdisciplinary studies which reiterates Thoreau's (and others who came before him) mentioned. He says that "wildlife managers" are uninterested in creating art or literature about the beauty of science. In the same sense, why should writers and artists have to rely on books for their inspiration? (quoted in Stewart 152-153). "'Writers who could combine science with art would have the power to change people's ideas about what is ultimately valuable in the land,' Leopold argued, and 'to change ideas about what land is for is to change ideas about what anything is for'" (Stewart 153). While people tend to argue the relationship between nature and art, versus the relationship between nature and science, Leopold argues that the two complement each other.

Arto Paasilinna (b. 1942) is different from other writers mentioned thus far in that he writes a novel about escapism rather than what may be referred to as nature writing. Paasilinna's novel, *The Year of the Hare,* communicates the same message about solitude and nature as the

others despite it being fictitious. The novel begins with two men: a journalist and a photographer who are rather unhappy with their current lives. When they hit a rabbit while driving, the journalist runs into the wilderness in search of the wounded animal. The rest of the novel tells of his journey, as he leaves his wife and job to travel in the wilderness with only a rabbit as his friend and companion. It is interesting that the main character is not in complete solitude throughout his journey as he is accompanied by a rabbit. It is important not only to note the genre of the book (fiction) but also the biographical elements of the author. In addition to being a novelist, Paasilinna, like the main character in his book, is a journalist. Thinking about it that way, the books serves as a sort of metaphor for his life, perhaps his desire to escape the reality and redundancy of his own life. More importantly though, the differences between *The Year of the Hare* and the previous nature writing works are an important indication of the change from pre-industrialization to late post-industrialization. The novel was published in 1975, during the time when desires for escapism heightened. However, because of the industrial revolution, it was more difficult for people to up and leave their families and jobs if even for a short period of time. As the desire for solitude increased, one's ability and willingness for solitude decreased. Thus, the downside to the industrial revolution was becoming apparent.

In *A Place of My Own,* Michael Pollan (b. 1955) gives an account of his attempts to build a place in which he can "read, write and daydream." Thus, this book too becomes an act of escapism for the purpose of creative inspiration. In ways, this book is similar to Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in which she claims a person must have a separate room only to write. However, in *A Place of My Own,* it becomes evident that the actual process of building is as much art as the end product itself or the writing he hopes to create once it is finished. The physical act of building is a return to nature in and of itself in the sense that it is manual labor.

Elements of nature are present in that he must decide which type of tree to use for building and the location and direction in which he wants his building to rest. More relevant though are his comments on human's attitudes toward nature. Think back to Muir and Leopold, extremists who believed in conservation and preservation above all. Pollan's view is that humans can live together with nature if they possess a balanced attitude regarding their personal relationship to the earth. Pollan does not shun humans for benefiting from that in which the earth provides. In this way, Pollan is similar to the preindustrial writers in that they welcomed a direct relationship with the earth such as using it for the food and nourishment it provides. However, the act of the constructing a place in which to "read, write and daydream" is very much a postindustrial thought in the sense that he is literally creating and inventing for himself a place of his own.

As is evident, the difference between the pre and postindustrial writers and the escapism trend is substantial. Prior to the industrial revolution, it was easier to go on retreats and explorations, especially as everyday life was already heavily dependent on nature. Think back to how Thoreau dedicated two whole years of his life to living secluded in a cabin on a pond. But with the industrial revolution came commitment to a more laborious way of life. We begin to see a shift in man's relationship to nature in Leopold's work. Then, in Paasilinna's work, man becomes so far separated from nature and consumed by this new life that escapism becomes more of a wish, a distant thought, than something he sees as realistically happening. Thus, with the onset of the industrial revolution, the desire to escape to nature increased while man's ability or willingness to do so decreased. In other words, although possible, it came at a much greater cost.

It is no accident that women have not been included in this work up until this point, reason being women were much less likely to isolate themselves from society. Perhaps it had to

do with the woman's responsibility to tend to the household and raise children, or their lack of desire to live the rugged life when provided with a home. Also, it is hard to ignore gender differences (such as the fact that it was men who were hunters) and stereotypes (such as women generally being physically weaker than men) that may have contributed to this lack of female representation. While some women finally did become advocates of solitude for inspiration, the differences between their experiences and the men's speak for themselves.

Mary Rowlandson (1637-1711) differs from writers that have been discussed thus far in not only that she is a woman, but she was forcefully, rather than willingly, isolated from her family. Her captivity narratives speak of the spiritual awareness she came to as a result of her eleven week and five day imprisonment (Dietrich 427). Although her captivity was forced, Rowlandson looked back on the experience and was thankful for the spiritual enlightenment it resulted in. According to Dietrich, Rowlandson said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted" (Dietrich 427). Through isolation, Rowlandson came to terms with her own identity and the role women play in society. As a result of her captivity, she developed an assertiveness that countered the passive role women are known to have played during this time. "She explores the frontiers of woman's sphere and woman's society definition, and thus explores her self-definition as she confronts her readers with her transformation from a confined, dependent woman to a woman for whom self-reliance is axiomatic" (Dietrich 428). Thus, Rowlandson contributes to our view of escapism in a backwards sort of way in that she was forced into solitude and wanted to escape from it. More importantly, though, it was through this experience that she learned about her identity, the identity and role of women during her time, and about the importance of maintaining faith.

Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) is similar to the other writers discussed thus far in that she was a recluse; however, rather than abandoning her lifestyle in search of solitude, she isolated herself within her own home. However, according to Emerson's definition, Dickinson was never in solitude because she remained within her home. Dickinson fits the dark and mysterious stereotypes typically associated with brilliant writers, as vividly portrayed in her works. Unlike the others who devoted a portion of their lives to solitude, she gave her entire life to being alone. Wendy Martin, editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson,* says in the introduction, "Often, Dickinson is painted as a young woman in white, closeted in the upper rooms of her home, isolated not only from neighbors and friends, but also from the historical and cultural events taking place outside her door" (1). It is ironic that Dickinson lived during the post-industrialization period because during a time in which people wanted to reconnect with the earth, she was most removed. "Dickinson is widely acknowledged as one of the founders of American poetry, an innovative pre-modernist poet as well as a rebellious and courageous woman" (Martin 1). Perhaps most interesting and significant about Dickinson's life is the fact that she only had a few of her poems published (1). She recorded her poems in "fascicles" but asked her sister to destroy them upon her death. Rather than doing so, her sister organized them and had many of them published (Martin 1). What makes this so curious and extraordinary is the fact that most people write with the intention of being read. However, Dickinson wished for her poetry to remain hidden and unknown, like herself. In other words, as the world became more removed from nature, but desired to return to their natural home of the earth, Dickinson turned her back on both society and nature.

While Rowlandson lived during the pre-industrial time period and Dickinson during the industrial revolution, Cheryl Strayed (b. 1968), author of *Wild: from Lost to Found on the Pacific*

Crest Trail continues to live during contemporary time. It was the year 1995 when she said, "I was alone. I was barefoot. I was twenty-six years old and an orphan too" (12). Her journey began as a result of her father's abandonment and her mother's death when Strayed was just twenty-two. She says:

> I was living alone in a studio apartment in Minneapolis, separated from my husband, and working as a waitress, as low and mixed-up as I'd ever been in my life. Each day I felt as if I were looking up from the bottom of a deep well. But from that well, I set about becoming a solo wilderness trekker. (13-14)

As for many, there was a cost for Strayed's escapism. "There was the quitting my job as a waitress and finalizing my divorce and selling almost everything I owned and saying goodbye to my friends and visiting my mother's grave one last time" (18). Strayed realized the danger of her excursion as a woman. She says, "Horrible things happened to hitchhikers, I knew, especially to women hitchhiking alone. They were raped and decapitated. Tortured and left for dead. But . . . I could not allow such thoughts to distract me" (55). However, the danger of being a woman alone in the wilderness was not the only danger she faced. She was also confronted with wild animals such as bears, and harsh weather conditions such as torrential rain and snow. During her journey, she refers to a quote from *The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume 1: California* by Charles Long, "'How can a book describe the psychological factors a person must prepare for … the despair, the alienation, the anxiety and especially the pain, both physical and mental, which slices to the very heart of the hiker's volition, which are the real things that must be planned for?'" (67). It was during her hike that Strayed finally realized the extent of what she was doing, that she realized how alone she was in the world, "I was on the road, but I had not seen a human being in eight days. This was civilization and yet, aside from the free-ranging cows and the two abandoned

tractors, and the road itself, there was no sign of it" (80). The most significant part of Strayed's story is the feeling she recalls having as a result of her journey. "The experience was powerful and fundamental. It seemed to me that it had always felt like this to be a human in the wild, and as long as the wild existed it would always feel this way" (217). Strayed's journey contributes many different insights to the motivation for and magnitude of leaving the comfort of the home behind for a dangerous yet life-changing adventure.

While the experiences of each of these women, Rowlandson (preindustrial), Dickinson (during the industrial revolution) and Strayed (postindustrial) are immensely different (as some were willed and some were forced, some retreated to the society while some remained closeted within the home) their experiences show similarities that include a positive attitude towards the insight they gained from their experiences. All three of these women are recognized for their bravery and ability to survive such a dangerous endeavor. Also important is the fact that great literature was produced from each of these experiences reiterating the creative process that results from solitude.

Cheryl Strayed is not the only one from contemporary society to participate in this trend of escapism we have seen evolve and continue since pre-industrial times. For example, several films, such as *Grizzly Man* and *Into the Wild* have been produced that depict contemporary men who too have had a taste for extremity and as a result, ventured into the wild. How contemporary society is different from pre and postindustrial society is important to consider. Today's society is known for its digital growth and technological advancement. In many ways, people have become isolated from human contact with one another, but at the same time are always connected through social media and the internet. This specific way of living has caused mainly two extreme types of people: those who have turned their back on nature and live through the

artificial, cyber-world, and those who despise the turn against nature and find themselves desperate to return to the simplicity of the past, a very pastoral way of thinking.

Grizzly Man, which was produced in 2005, is a documentary that takes place in Alaska where wildlife preservationist Timothy Treadwell lived without weapons among grizzlies for thirteen summers. Like Dickinson and others, Treadwell had a dark side to him as he was an alcoholic before becoming a sort of caretaker for wild grizzly bears. In the video footage, Treadwell admits to feeling lonely despite having his wife and bears as his companions. Unfortunately, unlike the other people thus far, Treadwell's story does not end happily. He and his wife eventually died, being killed by the very bears he had grown to love and devote his life to. Treadwell's ashes were scattered where he camped in Alaska. He says in the documentary how he found a way to survive with animals. Treadwell did not hesitate to make himself vulnerable, and it was what he loved that in the end killed him. Ironically, a friend of Treadwell's points out at the end of the documentary how hesitant he seemed to leave the last frame of his very last film. Although nobody will ever know, perhaps Treadwell became somewhat aware of the grave reality of matters. Although he is no longer alive, his creative message (in the form of film rather than writing) remains an artifact that continues to teach people about the constant return to the natural way of life from the beginning of documented society.

Similarly, *Into the wild*, which was produced in 2007, is a film about university student Christopher McCandless's solo retreat into the wilderness. The movie opens with a quote from Lord Byron, "There is a pleasure in the path less words; there is a rapture on the lonely shore; there is society, where none intrudes, by the deep sea, and music in its roar: I love not man the less, but Nature more…" Here, Byron comments on and compares his love for nature versus his love for man, because, as Stewart taught us earlier, the two are separate, nature being anything

aside from man and his creation. Through this quote, he contradicts the common belief that those who appreciate nature must then love men less. At the beginning of the film, life in nature is described as "No longer poisoned by civilization…" This idea mimics one of the contemporary extremist mindsets that society is poisoned, thus nature, separate from society, is pure. McCandless found himself in the wilderness because of his desire for a new identity and to break away from the time constraints of modern day society. His solution to a lack of love and people treating each other badly was to leave society and return to nature.

Each person thus far has had some sort of motive, many similar in ways, for seeking a more natural and positive life for themselves. For example, truth and identity are two common themes found in this movie. This movie shows how the journey to seeking truth, reason, and identity is more important than the insights gained in the end. "If we admit that human life can be ruled by reason" he says, "then the meaning of life is destroyed." What would life be if it provided us with more answers than questions? What would be our purpose? How would we grow as individuals and create meaning for ourselves? The film is based on journal entries McCandless created through his experience that serve as a memoir of his journey. At one point, he writes, "Rained in, lonely, scared." While each creative individual certainly possessed a commendable amount of courage in order to do what they did, they do not fail to acknowledge the fear they also faced. McCandless comments on society's emphasis on interpersonal relationships. He says that joy is in more than human relationships, that God has placed it all around us in nature. While humans provide us with companionship, so are the trees and animals also capable of doing so. Like Treadwell, McCandless's excursion and life is cut short as he literally becomes trapped in the wild from eating a poisonous plant. This is significant because in the past, animals were capable of surviving alone in the wild; however, modernization has made

humans dependable creatures who no longer possess the instinct of nature that animals possess. This movie serves as more of an antithesis in that McCandless, unlike all the others, feels regret and remorse as he lies dying in the end. He says, "happiness is real only when shared." Unfortunately though, for him it is too late. While the movie ends in truth, it is as if McCandless had to sacrifice his life in order to achieve it. Thus again, we are forced to consider the cost of achieving such ultimatums.

Lastly, Robert Kull's (b. 1946) *Solitude: Seeking Wisdom in Extremes* recreates his adventures alone in the Patagonia Wilderness. He was driven to solitude when he lost his leg in a motorcycle crash. In 2001, Kull ventured to a remote area in Chile for a year "with only a cat and his thoughts as his companions." It is interesting that Kull was drawn to solitude for spiritual reasons just as writers were doing in the 1700 and 1800's during the industrial revolution. For example, Kull, like other writers thus far, refers to the struggle that exists between remaining solitary and maintaining a voice. "Paradoxically, the voice of solitude must, in some sense, remain silent. As soon as the solitary begins to speak even if by writing to an imagined reader, he (or she) is no longer truly alone" (ix). Kull is not the first or only person to claim that writing is a conversation between the writer and his or her audience. Kull also comments on how society places an emphasis on interpersonal relationships:

> In many cultures, solitude is recognized as an opportunity to journey inward; in our culture, spending time alone is often considered unhealthy because we tend to believe that meaning in life is found only through relationship with other people. But to be fully human, we need relationship not only with other people but with the nonhuman world, with our own inner depths – and with Something Greater. (x)

A common philosophical question deals with the question of what it means to be human and how humans differ from and fit into the rest of the world. Here, Kull is admitting the need for but not solely of interpersonal relationships, but also a connection with our innermost selves and with a spiritual being. In addition to answering larger questions about humanity, nature enables one to answer questions about his or her own identity. He admits that "one of the challenges of nature is that you have to face yourself" (x). Kull clarifies his point by saying that all kinds of relationships, not just interpersonal relationships, are important. "There needs to be relationship. Without that, life is dead. My commitment here is to relationship with self, nature, and spirit" (65). Interestingly, as you will later see, Kull's beliefs about interpersonal relationships are not the only ways he is similar to Storr.

What is especially interesting about Kull's adventure is that it began as an experiment for his university dissertation. Kull struggled with how to get what he wanted out of research while providing the university with the academics the project required. "The procedure of studying oneself is academically unconventional . . . If I were to merely read the writings of other solitaries, I would be studying their verbal reports, not their actual experience" (76). Like me, Kull's intention was to study his own experience in solitude. "Self-knowledge" he says, "is vital to our understanding of the world and our place in it" (77). However, he discusses the criticism that goes along embarking on a journey that is "self-absorbed" (77). Kull argues that journeys into solitude are valuable because they enable people to discover insights about all of humankind. The fact that the mind functions best is solitude is supported by other examples, such as meditation, that Kull provides. He claims that through these solitary practices, the mind settles and as a result can focus more clearly (79). And, like both Storr and McCandless, Kull recognized that there are specific motives that draw people towards solitude: "In the writings of

actual people who have taken themselves voluntarily into solitude, I find a mix of various motives: spiritual quest; love of nature; preference for living alone; the challenge of achieving a goal" (129). Is it that humans go into solitude because they dislike people or because they love animals and nature? Kull discusses how solitude affects man's relationship with animals and nature:

> Solitaries have a tendency to anthropomorphize and describe the non-human world in metaphorical language. This is especially evident in some of Thoreau's writing. When I attribute thoughts, emotions, or intentionality to the world around me, I do it in a self-reflexive way, often with tongue in cheek. I'm not claiming I actually know what animals, or the wind, think or feel, but in solitude the visceral experience can be intense and magical – at times, terrifying. And, if I can't logically claim to know the thoughts and feelings of animals, neither can I dismiss such intuitive identification. Perhaps in solitude I become more sensitive to connections usually invisible to our city-dulled senses. I simply don't know. In any case, personalizing animals and elemental forces seems to happen naturally in solitude. (132)

The idea that in solitude man becomes more sensitive to his senses is profound.

While it is true that all solitaries' experiences differ, they all seem to seek solitude for many of the same reasons and as a result face the same enlightenments. "[A] commonality all solitaries seem to share is the experience of feeling vibrantly, often ecstatically, *alive* in a *living* world" (132). While I can relate to what Kull says, I have a difficult time putting it into words. As someone who has always possessed a love for the written word, I was deeply frustrated that language seemed to fail me when I merely attempted to reflect in a journal all that I had come to

feel and discover through my solitary experience in nature. I had no words to accurately describe the contentedness I felt. Never before had I felt so alive. And yet, this was something that I was unable to share with anyone else. But the fact that I wanted others to experience what I was feeling was contradictory in that this was a solitary experience for me. Here I was, along with other nature writers, torn between the joyous feeling I received from solitude and wanting to share this feeling so as to teach and inspire others! This conflict is similar to when people sometimes but not always feel lonely in isolation. "Solitude provides an opportunity to investigate the sense of alienation many of us experience in our culture and to realize that being alone is not identical with feeling isolated and lonely . . . Perhaps we should use the term solitude to refer to the experience of spaciousness in being alone, and isolation to the experience of being cut off" (205, 208). Kull makes a statement that I really connected with and understood, one that I take as one of the most important discoveries I made throughout my journey of solitude. He says, "I discover that I'm not identical to the conception I often have of myself as an isolated individual. I'm more fluid and profoundly part of the flowing whole" (211). I love the idea that through solitude in nature one discovers a part of himself that he did not know existed.

Kull comments on the reality of just how much technology consumes our lives. Kull, like me, brought his phone on his journey to solitude at the requests of his family and friends. He makes the realization that "the existence of technology in our lives has become so ubiquitous that what was once a rare luxury has become not only a necessity, but a seemingly eternal reality" (240). But Kull also makes a realization about his religion and spirituality. Because he tried and did not connect with any one religion, he turned to nature for his spirituality:

> My basic spiritual practice is daily meditation and retreat into solitude. Alone in the wilderness, my awareness deepens. I slow down and frequently pause to come

> back to myself in the here and now. In loving-kindness meditation each morning I ask for peace, happiness, and freedom from suffering for all people, plants, and animals in the world. Before each meal I pause to give thanks and offer a small portion of my food to the earth. In solitude, daily rituals spontaneously develop that enrich my life and express my sense of gratitude. These regular practices create a sense of stability that helps maintain equilibrium. (271-272)

The interesting thing about solitude is that an individual feels he learns so much through this journey, and yet cannot seem to express what he has learned. "This was a contention of the doubt, frustration, and anxiety I'd often felt on the island about not finding the answers I was seeking, and the belief that I should have *Answers* to share with others" (313). Not arriving at answers is partly due to the lack of one's ability to communicate the beauty of nature through language. The other part of it is that perhaps it is not so much about the answers as it is about the journey of arriving at them.

Interestingly, not everyone who journeys into solitude recommends the experience. For example, Kull says that if a person is not called to solitude than the experience is not for him:

> People sometimes ask if I recommend deep wilderness solitude to others. I do not. It's painful, difficult, and sometimes dangerous. A person needs to be called to it from deep within, and if someone requires external encouragement, he or she is not ready. But I do think many of us can benefit from stepping out of our hectic daily activities to spend some time alone. Often when I ask someone how they are, they reply, 'Busy." This seems to refer to an ongoing state psychological stress as well as to constant physical activity. I suspect this feeling is pervasive in

> modern culture and I wonder how long we have lived with the sense that we don't have enough time to do what we believe we must do. (319)

Kull's mention of time is interesting in that it is yet another motive for one's draw towards solitude. The industrialized world we live in is so demanding that we never feel we have enough time, and by leaving those demands, it seems we have all the time in the world, although time itself has not been altered in any way. This industrialized world is what alienates humans from own home (320), and by alienating ourselves from others, we hope to return to this home.

Like Kull, Jonathan Bate also writes in *The Song of the Earth* how technology has separated humans from their natural home and how writers rely on their words for that return. "Our longing for the imagined health of the past must be a sign of the sickness of the present" (2). In other words, people cannot be happy in the present if they are reminiscing about the past. Bate discusses man's current, unfortunate relationship with nature. "The condition of the modern man, with his mobility and his displaced knowledge, is never to be able to share this sense of belonging. He will always be an outsider; his return to nature will always be partial, touristic and semi-detached" (18). It seems then that increasing pollution and diminishing resources have caused humans to desperately rekindle the relationship they once had with nature. Towards the end of the book Bates says, "What are poets for? They are not exactly philosophers, though they often try to explain the world and humankind's place within it" (251). This has been something that people, dating back to years before Christ have struggled to answer, and continue to do so today.

As is communicated through McCandless and Treadwell's stories, there is still a very real sense of danger in performing acts of solitude. The cost is high as creative individuals risk their lives with the hopes of attaining a single moment where they feel most alive. Of the

contemporary creative individuals that have been examined here, two resulted in death—the ultimate price they could have paid. Thus, even today solitude comes with great dangers including extreme living conditions, poisonous plants, carnivores and more.

Looking back at the creative individuals from preindustrial times to today, it is apparent that people continue to seek generalities (such as truth, identity and spirituality) that can only be achieved through solitude. Preindustrial men such as Euripides; those who lived during the industrial revolution such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir; postindustrial men including Aldo Leopold and Michael Pollan; women including Mary Rowlandson, Emily Dickinson and Cheryl Strayed; and contemporaries including Timothy Treadwell, Christopher McCandless and Robert Kull each contribute to our composite understanding of the trend to achieve creative inspiration and overall greatness through a turn against society and towards the simplistic life nature offers. Despite differences between each of their stories, they offer profound similarities that speak of the value of such an experience. While they all face some sort of fear somewhere during their endeavors, most (except for only a couple) come away from it alive and thankful for how the experience has forever changed their lives. Although solitude comes at a great risk and cost that in which can be achieved only through solitude is valuable beyond words can communicate. If the purpose of life rests in the journeys we take, the truths we reach, and the spirituality we come to hope for and believe in, than the only way true way to live is through such an experience.

II. Solitude in Poetry

While I was writing my thesis, I took a course on studies in poetry and realized that there is a connection between poets and solitude. This part of my paper focuses on that connection. Reading and writing are primarily, but not always, acts of solitude. Man typically thrives from a

quiet environment in which to read and write, however, it is also true that literature is meant to be talked about with others. John Stuart Mill states in his essay "Thoughts on Poetry and its Varieties" that although the poet writes in solitude, he is aware of a future audience; however, if he writes like he knows of his audience, "he acts ill." Ralph Waldo Emerson speaks on this same idea in his essay, "Nature" however he more closely defines solitude. He says, "To go into solitude, a man needs to retire as much from his chamber as from society. I am not solitary whilst I read and write, though nobody is with me" (17). Thus, it is evident that there exists a direct connection between man (the poet), solitude, and poetry. "Poetry, accordingly, is the natural fruit of solitude and meditation; eloquence, of intercourse with the world" (Mill). In other words, the poet communicates with others through his solo act of writing. In "Nature" Emerson discusses the relationship between man and nature, and how nature presents beauty to man, yet so few are capable of seeing it "but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet" (18). In his words:

> To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminates only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of the child. The lover of nature is he whose inward and outward senses are still truly adjusted to each other; who has retained the spirit of infancy even into the era of manhood. (19)

Thus, Emerson's words here depict more than one's ability to see nature, but also expounds on what poetry as a genre is, which in a sense is the ability to look at the world with the awe and wonder of that of a child. Conclusively, although the writer and the piece of writing exist separately from one another, literature shows that there is a direct relationship between poetry and the poet that influences the act of the creative process as a whole.

In addition to poetry often being about solitude, poetic modes themselves often mimic it too. For example, according to Mill, sonnets and soliloquies are spoken aloud but to oneself as one's thoughts, indicating a sense of being alone. One also ought to consider elegies and how mourning death is usually done in solitude. Yves Bonnefoy's poems titled "A Stone" are just a few examples of this. It can be argued that the stone in these poems are grave stones. Thus, from this, we are able to picture a grieving individual visiting a grave site, something we typically see people do by themselves. In addition, elements of nature such as birds, flowers, etc. are often used in elegies. For example, in his poem, "When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd," Walt Whitman uses lilacs as a symbol for the death and memory of Abraham Lincoln. Other elements of nature that we have seen represent death in poetry include: fire, ashes, water, wind, and more. In addition, it can be argued that odes as a poetic mode are also examples of solitude for both the poet and that or who in which the ode pays tribute. Ironically, John Keats writes an ode to solitude, the first line and the title being "O Solitude! If I must with thee Dwell." Another poetic mode that mimics solitude is the pastoral which discusses the problems of nature and a turn from the city to the simplicity of the country. Lastly, the sublime often depicts both beauty and terror, often found in nature in which man is overwhelming alone. Emerson says

> But if a man would be alone, let him look at the stars. The rays that come from those heavenly worlds will separate between him and what he touches. One might think the atmosphere was made transparent with this design, to give man, in the heavenly bodies, the perpetual presence of the sublime. (17)

Thus, the sublime deals with man's most inner thoughts and philosophical questions about life, existence and mortality. In his poem, "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" John Keats says, "then on the shore of the wide world I stand alone, and think / Till love and fame to

nothingness do sink." This represents the solitude as portrayed through the sublime in that the speaker considers his meaning and place in the world and how he too will eventually sink into the vast waters and become nothing. As a result of this realization, he comes to conclusion that love and fame also don't matter. Also, in his poem titled "A Time Between Ashes and Roses," Adonis says, "Let's tell the truth: / We are Absence / The sky did not birth us, neither did dust" (109). This line represents solitude and the sublime in that the speaker says we are nonexistent for we were not born from the earth. This existential type of question is similar to a quote by Arthur C. Clarke which says, "Two possibilities exist: either we are alone in the universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying." What these examples show is that solitude is often portrayed through the poetic modes in addition to the poem's words themselves.

The relationship between solitude and nature differs as is depicted through poetry. Lord Byron argues in his poem "Solitude" that solitude is not appreciating the beauty of nature when alone in its presence, but rather recognizing the beauty of nature when immersed in chaos. In other words, anyone can recognize nature's beauty when he is in solitude; rather, the true meaning of solitude is being able to remove oneself from chaos in seek or appreciation of its beauty. On the other hand, Keats's argues in "O Solitude! If I must with thee dwell" that man is not in solitude unless only in the presence of nature. This view, although different from Lord Byron's, also makes sense in that man is more private and reflective when alone in the natural world than in any other sort of accompaniment. As a result, these two viewpoints show that the effect solitude has on a poet is inconsistent depending on the poet's belief and attitude toward nature.

Solitude must be paired with some sort of outlet in order to produce creativity rather than insanity. Kahlil Gibran has published many writings on solitude and hermitage which discuss the

idea of the "madman," an individual who separates himself from society. However, it is important to understand that it is possible to be isolated from society and not go mad. In his introduction, Adonis states that a person must have some sort of outlet, in this case creativity, in order to benefit from isolation. He says

In *Mihyar* and *Migrations* we find solitude and imagination emerging as powerful forces, uniting within the speaker's mind and lifting him to ecstasy, then separating and forcing him to pit them against each other in order to reunite them. Imagination, coupled with solitude, allows the speaker to witness the transformative capacities of nature, where language is the currency/blood of renewed paradigms. Nature beings to mimic our habits and wear our features, rooting us where we perpetually feel estranged. Without imagination . . . solitude is liable to erase all knowledge of oneself. (xvii)

Thus, a person must be able to turn his thoughts towards something and release his energies in order to not mentally drive himself crazy. In "Biographia Literaria," Samuel Taylor Coleridge discusses the relationship between the poet and his imagination. "A poet . . . diffuses a tone, and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination." Here, imagination can be thought of as a sort of magnet that pulls everything within the poem together.

Solitude plays a primary role in many poets' lives which as a result, influences their poetry. First, Emily Bronte (1818-1848) lived a very secluded life, so much so that she is often referred to as Absolute Individual. Sources say that for three years, she only spoke to her family and to servants (academic.brookelyn.cuny.edu). C.D. Merriman discusses in a biography on Bronte the tragedy that seemed to follow Bronte everything; perhaps it was this tragedy that resulted in her choice to isolate herself. Interestingly, some people say that her novel, *Wuthering*

Heights is a biographical representation of her own life (academic.brookelyn.cuny.edu). In many ways, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886) lived a life similar to Bronte's, which is interesting as they are two women who lived during the same time period. Dickinson was a recluse, meaning that she isolated herself within her own home. Wendy Martin says in the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Emily Dickinson,* "Often, Dickinson is painted as a young woman in white, closeted in the upper rooms of her home, isolated not only from neighbors and friends, but also from the historical and cultural events taking place outside her door" (1). What is interesting about Dickinson's life is that she was one of the few who didn't write with the intention of having it be read by an audience. She asked her sister that her poems be destroyed upon her death, however, her sister gathered them and instead had many of them published (Martin 1). Overall, Dickinson simply wished for her poetry to remain hidden and unknown like her.

In conclusion, there is a complex relationship between poetry and the poet himself. Solitude is necessary for the poet to possess creative inspiration; however, it must be paired with imagination in order for poetry to arise from it. A quote from Coleridge sums this idea up well. "Finally, GOOD SENSE is the BODY of poetic genius, FANCY its DRAPERY, MOTION its LIFE, and IMAGINATION the SOUL that is everywhere, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole." Here, Coleridge gives a sort of recipe for the creative genius saying how imagination, soul, etc. come together as one to form what's truly great.

III. My Experience in Solitude

The idea to research the effects of creative inspiration through isolation from society came from my passion for literature, nature and animals. I grew up camping with my family and thus developed a love for nature. A year and a half ago, my love for animals gave me reason to become a vegetarian. Then, last year, I stumbled across Arto Paasilinna's novel, *The Year of the*

Hare, in which a journalist abandons his family and career to live in the wild with a rabbit, and came up with the idea for this project. As a child, I was very much a people person; however, as I have grown older I have come to be more reflective and to appreciate solitude, partly as a way of escapism from my recently diagnosed obsessive compulsive disorder. I was interested to see how this project affects me (along with how it has affected others) as a person, but more specifically, as a writer. As a result, I came up with the idea to research the effects of creative inspiration on isolation from society for my undergraduate honors thesis (and was fascinated when I learned that Kull explored solitude for his dissertation).

Honors students are given the choice to study anything (upon approval) and complete either a creative or academic component; I decided to do both. The first component of my project is a research of the history of people who have participated in isolation from society for creative inspiration, and more specifically, a study on the connection between poets and solitude; the second component is a modern day reenactment of this experience.

Of course I wanted to research creative individuals who have isolated themselves from society before, but I also wanted to feel for myself the effects of isolation on the creative mind. Like Thoreau, I wanted to experience firsthand everything these creative individuals had spoken about. Since preindustrial times, people have returned to the woods in sought of something, sometimes not knowing what it actually was that they were seeking. The fact that despite hundreds of years, people continue to do this sort of thing today is extraordinary, and I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to begin to try to understand for myself the value of this journey, not solely through other people's memoirs and accounts, but through my own related experience. While I did not devote an entire year of my life hiking in the mountains, or build a cabin in

which to live alone on a pond for over two years, I did recreate a few similar experiences that began to teach me the same things these creative individuals over the years have come to learn.

For my first experience (July 2012), I camped at a local campground in Hocking Hills located in Ohio. I had my phone with me for emergencies but did not use it, just as I did not have access to a computer, internet service, television, radio, et cetera. While there, I stuck to a basic diet of bread, fruits and vegetables and built my own campfires. For entertainment, I read books pertaining to my thesis, took photographs (which I later turned into a photo book. Visit **http://tinyurl.com/cmqgd24** to view it!), went hiking and explored nature, and maintained a journal the old fashioned way using a quill and ink set to record my experience. For my second experience (August 2012), I stayed at a secluded log cabin in Hocking Hills. It is that trip which brought me closest to a natural and isolated environment.

Of course there are several limitations to my project. The first limitation is time because I had to complete my thesis by graduation, while student teaching, attending school, and working a part time job. Another limitation is money. As much as I would have liked, I was not in a place financially where I could quit work to explore solitude. Furthermore, it cost to stay in a cabin in the woods. Another limitation includes the extent at which I "lived" in nature due to safety precautions and modernity. Lastly, my research was limited in that this is not an exhaustive list of creative individuals who have participated in solitude. With every book I read, my list of books to read grew. I finally realized that it was not realistic to try to read every book related to this topic and that I had to cut the research off at some point. However, I hope to continue my research in the future as this is something I am really passionate about.

The works below are those that I used for research. I have pulled from a combination of texts including: fiction, nonfiction, biographies, poetry, theory, essays, et cetera. However, you

will not find many internet sources. While some may say my research is lacking because I only used print sources, I felt it was contradictory to use the internet when I was describing how necessary it is to remove oneself from technology and modernity.

I now understand why several writers claim that you cannot understand the solitary experience in nature until you have done it on your own. Trying to explain my experience is difficult, which is frustrating for me as a writer with a particular love for the written word. But that is okay, because this was more an experience for myself, and one that others must take for themselves if they want to understand. I honestly feel my solitary experience in nature was a transformative moment for me. I grew as an individual on so many different levels, including both spiritually and intellectually. I now believe that because of this experience I have an appreciation for and understanding of nature that not everyone can understand. Furthermore, this experience has taught me a lot about myself. My journey into solitude was a very philosophical experience in that I felt connected with these larger questions about truth and identity. Overall, this experience has taught me about life itself, but more importantly, has showed me what is truly important and valuable in this life.

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