

“WHAT A PLACE TO LIVE”: HOME AND WILDERNESS
IN DOMESTIC AMERICAN TRAVEL LITERATURE, 1835–1883

DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

Focusing on the period 1835–1883, this dissertation examines how authors of nineteenth-century domestic American travel literature conceived of the relationships between ideas of the wilderness and of home. While American travel literature as a broad field has garnered a large amount of critical attention in past decade, much of that focus has been on Americans traveling abroad. As a result, texts documenting travel within the domestic United States have not received the critical attention they deserve. This dissertation seeks to address this gap in current criticism by analyzing texts by Washington Irving, Caroline Kirkland, Henry David Thoreau, George William Curtis, Bayard Taylor, Mark Twain, and Helen Hunt Jackson. In arguing that these works of domestic American travel literature redefine the wilderness as a potential home that carries both personal and national significances for these authors, I reveal the continuities not only between nineteenth-century conceptions of nature and home but also among the literary movements of the century.

This dissertation adds to existing travel literature scholarship and ecocritical discussions of nineteenth-century American literature (a) by addressing a set of texts that has been undervalued for its contributions to American thinking about the relationship between humans and nature in particular and to American literary history in general; (b)

by analyzing the interconnections that exist not only among these less-studied texts but also between them and their better-known fictional counterparts; and most importantly, (c) by offering a new understanding of nineteenth-century representations of the fundamental connection between the American wilderness and the home and the various roles that relationship played in American literature and culture.

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INTRODUCTION

“NOT A PLACE TO VISIT”: NINETEENTH-CENTURY DOMESTIC AMERICAN TRAVEL LITERATURE

In his essay collection *The Practice of the Wild*, Gary Snyder writes, “There has been no wilderness without some kind of human presence for several thousand years. Nature is not a place to visit, it is home—and within that home territory there are more familiar and less familiar places” (7). Similarly, at the outset of “Walking, or The Wild,” Henry David Thoreau asserts a fundamental link between humans and nature. “I wish to speak a word for Nature,” he proclaims, “for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society” (592). Separated though they are by some 140 years of American history, Snyder and Thoreau raise the same important question: How should we live in relation to our natural environment? Their answers to that question—that nature is home, and we are part and parcel of it—erase any clear boundaries between the territories of nature and culture and wilderness and home, suggesting instead that these opposed terms are less oppositional than they have traditionally been understood to be. This dissertation examines the points at which authors of nineteenth-century domestic American travel literature experience those “less familiar places” in nature as the “more familiar” place of home.

The problem of the relationship between humans and nature addressed by Snyder and Thoreau comprises an important theme throughout the American literary tradition, one that becomes of particular interest during the nineteenth century. As the United States expanded geographically and as industrialization and economic expansion enabled increased leisure travel, domestic American travelers began to see the wilderness itself as a possible destination. Several factors played a part in this development. The infrastructure of transportation within the United States improved in the early nineteenth century, marked by such events as the National Road reaching Wheeling, West Virginia, in 1818, and Columbus, Ohio, in 1833; the completion of the Erie Canal in 1825; and the opening of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1830. By midcentury, a network of railroads connected the major cities of the nation, linking New York to Chicago, Philadelphia to Charleston, thus enabling not only more efficient commercial transportation but also increased leisure travel. As the nation's transportation network was growing, so too were its geographical boundaries expanding. With the Louisiana Purchase in 1803, the nation added the land between the Mississippi River and the Rocky Mountains to its territory. In 1819, the United States acquired Florida from Spain, and in the 1840s and 1850s, the nation set its northern boundary with Canada through the Oregon Treaty, annexed the Republic of Texas, and established its claim to the desert southwest and California through the Mexican War and Gadsden Purchase. Coinciding with this expansion of U.S. national boundaries was a relocation and removal of the American Indian inhabitants of these territories. In 1795, the Treaty of Greenville ceded some seventeen million acres of Ohio from Shawnee Indian possession to the United States. Throughout the 1800s, then, the United States carried out an aggressive

expansionist policy that dislocated American Indian tribes from their traditional lands. That policy is perhaps most clearly embodied by the early 1830s Trail of Tears, during which Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek Indians were forcefully removed from the southeastern United States and placed on reservations in the territories that would become Oklahoma and Kansas. This backdrop of Indian Removal and improvements in transportation technologies allowed nineteenth-century Americans to alter their vision of the American wilderness. Now (relatively) easily accessed and emptied of most of its physical threats, the wilderness could be imagined as something other than inherently dangerous. In *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Roderick Nash points out that “by the middle decades of the nineteenth century wilderness was recognized as a cultural and moral resource and a basis for national self-esteem” (67). Nash notes that the “tradition of repugnance” (24) toward the wilderness that had previously characterized frontier responses to wild land slowly gave way to attitudes that appreciated the aesthetic value of wilderness.

Although Nash identifies William Byrd II’s *History of the Dividing Line* (1729) as “the first extensive commentary on wilderness that reveals a feeling other than hostility” (51),¹ skepticism and hostility toward wild nature certainly persisted well into the nineteenth century (and beyond). J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur’s *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), for instance, closes with a letter that underscores the “distresses of a frontier-man”: “Which ever way I look, nothing but the most frightful precipices present themselves to my view, in which hundreds of my friends and

¹ Nash links Byrd’s aesthetic appreciation of the North Carolina and Virginia wilds to Byrd’s “gentlemanly leanings” (52). Susan Imbarrato and Deborah Dietrich note that Byrd’s text remained in manuscript form until 1841 (Martin 81).

acquaintances have already perished: of all animals, that live on the surface of the planet, what is man when no longer connected with society; or when he finds himself surrounded by a convulsed and a half-dissolved one?" (187). Caught between viewing the wilderness as full of threats and feeling the need to "revert into a state approaching nearer to that of nature" (199), Crèvecoeur's Farmer James opts not only to remove his family from the European settlements of the American frontier but also to remain "sufficiently remote from the brutality of unconnected savage nature" (199). Thus, even as Crèvecoeur's farmer moves nearer to nature, he epitomizes the tradition of repugnance toward it.

Crèvecoeur highlights the complicated position that the American wilderness occupied from the late eighteenth into the mid-nineteenth centuries. While Romantic theories of the sublime, the beautiful, and the picturesque allowed the wilderness to become "a novelty" (Nash 57) that Americans could invest with nationalist pride, portions of that wilderness also remained fundamentally dangerous. The American wild could still pose a serious threat to those who entered it—either from the fear of attack by American Indian tribes or from the dangers of the land itself. In *A Tour on the Prairies*, for example, Washington Irving uses the threat of Indian attack to propel his adventure narrative. In *The Oregon Trail*, Francis Parkman, Jr., similarly calls attention to such "Indian alarms," labeling the Indians "human wolves" (401) who were often "prowling" (393) around the travelers' encampments. By contrast, Henry David Thoreau and Helen Hunt Jackson suggest the threats that the wilderness might pose on its own. In "The Allegash and East Branch," Thoreau documents losing his companion in the Maine

woods and the ensuing search (*Maine Woods* 354–61), and in *Bits of Travel at Home*, Jackson often calls attention to the arduous exertion required as she explores California’s Sierra Nevada and Colorado’s Rocky Mountains.

“Generally speaking,” however, Thoreau suggests, “a howling wilderness does not howl: it is the imagination of the traveler that does the howling” (*Maine Woods* 300). Farmer James’s “howling” at the end of Crèvecoeur’s text encapsulates the perception of the American wilderness as hostile, unfamiliar—as anything but home. This dissertation analyzes a contrasting thread in American literary production, a range of texts in which both the wilderness and the imagination of the traveler *cease* to howl: those texts of domestic American travel literature where authors perceive an emerging continuity between themselves and nature, and between their homes and the wildernesses they confront.

Because their narrative logic usually involves an excursion away from a stable, defined sense of “home” and into a natural environment that is set in relief against that notion of home, the narratives produced by westward expansion into the unsettled territory of the United States, as well as those by leisure travelers along the eastern seaboard and elsewhere, offer us an especially fruitful lens through which we may examine how nineteenth-century Americans imagined and represented the “wilderness” they encountered; how their “forays” into that wilderness shaped their conceptions of “home” (in both communal and national terms); and how the narratives of such travel contribute to and call into question American nationalism.

While these issues certainly surface in the canonical American fiction of the nineteenth century,² exploring them in the travel literature of the period is of equal importance, for a close study of American travel literature and the cultural work it performed can provide us with a fuller picture of nineteenth-century American literary and cultural production. Despite its popularity during the 1800s for authors and readers alike, and despite the recently renewed critical interest in travel writing as a genre, nineteenth-century domestic American travel literature remains a rich but understudied body of work. This dissertation takes several steps toward recovering this literature by placing less-discussed works by well-known authors such as Washington Irving, Henry David Thoreau, and Mark Twain in an ongoing dialogue with (a) their better-known works and with (b) works of less-studied contemporaries such as Caroline Kirkland, George William Curtis, Bayard Taylor, and Helen Hunt Jackson.³ More significantly, this project argues that these authors often conceive of home and wilderness not in oppositional but in complementary terms. All in their various ways recognize the wilderness as a potentially familiar territory, unearthing the links between home and nature with personal, philosophical, and political consequences.

² For example, Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" (1835) figures the woods surrounding Salem as a "heathen wilderness" (117), a site of moral wickedness. In his Deerslayer novels such as *The Pioneers* (1823) and *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), James Fenimore Cooper often expresses a more mixed view of the American wilderness. It is both the source of Natty Bumppo's admirable traits, which are often set in contrast to those of more "civilized" characters, and it is a territory inevitably disappearing in the face of advancing settlements. As Cooper writes at the end of *The Pioneers*, Natty is a part of that advancement, "the foremost in that band of Pioneers, who are opening the way for the march of the nation across the continent" (456). And as I discuss briefly in chapter 4, Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) contrasts what Huck sees as the confines of civilization and domesticity with what he perceives as the freedom of the raft and of the West.

³ As will become evident from my later chapters, several of the works I discuss have generated very little sustained critical conversation. While the texts by Thoreau and Twain, and to a lesser extent those by Kirkland and Irving, have been the subjects of thoughtful analyses in recent years, those by Taylor, Curtis, and Jackson remain very much outside the purview of current discussions.

Concepts of “home” and “wilderness” have long been crucial to the study of American literature and culture, but a close literary analysis of the texts so centrally concerned with those concepts—the domestic travel literature of nineteenth-century America—has yet to be produced. While Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind* provides an extensive, influential history of American conceptions of the wilderness, its ambitious scope requires a limited attention to specific texts—and Nash’s emphasis is less on a particular genre of literary production than on a particular idea. By contrast, my aim is to examine how the particular ideas of wilderness and home are constructed in and negotiated through a particular genre of writing, and my approach is to trace the progression of these authors’ ideas as they emerge during the course of the travels. While inspired partly by Nash’s study, this dissertation is ultimately very different in scope and critical approach. Focusing on a small selection of authors and their respective works, I fuse a close reading of these narratives with a concern for historical and cultural context to analyze how the concepts of home and wilderness developed in domestic American travel literature during the years from 1835 to 1883.

The critical study of nineteenth-century American travel literature has blossomed during the past decade. Much of that work, however, focuses on the cultural capital that European travel extended to Americans in the 1800s. As William W. Stowe points out in *Going Abroad*, for example, Americans “used . . . European travel . . . to assert and defend social and cultural positions of privilege and domination” (43). The social distinction offered by European travel both emphasized class distinctions within America and confirmed American nationalism in the face of foreign cultures. As a result, the categories of “home” and “abroad” develop as key concepts in these travel texts. In

Forgiving the Boundaries, Terry Caesar notes the fundamental value of home to American travelers, even in going abroad: Americans write of travel abroad “in order to be responsible to their national identities” (5). European travel thus becomes a vehicle through which Americans imagine themselves as a nation, and Caesar contends that this national self-imagining could only be realized through overseas encounters: “In travel books that take place entirely within America,” Caesar writes, “these certainties [of home] are not tested” (12).⁴

Indeed, as Caesar’s assertion suggests, a critical prejudice exists against domestic American travel texts—one that reiterates the widespread nineteenth-century belief that domestic travel was inherently inferior to European travel (just as American culture was somehow diminished from its transatlantic forebears).⁵ In his conclusion to *Return Passages*, Larzer Ziff exemplifies this attitude: “The literature of western travel celebrated America’s unique features and in so doing encouraged provincial self-satisfaction in the face of a wider world. The literature of travel abroad, however, attached America to the world” (284). That literature of Americans traveling abroad has thus achieved a privileged place in contemporary criticism, and accounts of domestic travel have consequently remained understudied and undervalued for their contributions to nineteenth-century American thought.

⁴ In *A Winter in the West*, Charles Fenno Hoffman offers a clear counter to Caesar’s assertion. After interacting at some length with the Kickapoo and other Plains Indians, Hoffman notes the need for a traveler to shed his preconceived notions: “The Englishman’s estimation of the Anglo-American, and the Anglo-American’s appreciation of the aborigines of his country, must alike be unfair, so long as each will most preposterously persist in judging everything according to a *home* standard” (II: 92; my emphasis). Hoffman’s phrasing casts the western plains as being both “his country” and different from his “home standard,” thereby suggesting that “home” is not the uncontested concept Caesar suggests it is.

⁵ In *The Sketch Book*, Washington Irving articulates this belief, somewhat ironically. “I will visit this land of wonders,” Geoffrey Crayon announces about his voyage to Europe, “and see the gigantic race from which I am degenerated” (15)

This project refocuses our critical attention on texts that document travel within the territories of the continental United States. In many ways, I aim to correct Caesar's assumption about the value of domestic American travel literature, for Caesar's assertion neglects a crucial fact of much domestic American travel literature: "home" and "nation" are far from stable categories in texts about domestic travel in nineteenth-century America, and the authors of these narratives are often engaged in an ongoing, active "testing" of the "certainties" that Caesar believes to be unquestioned. Domestic travel narratives do not simply reinforce a "provincial self-satisfaction" at the expense of connecting to the larger world, as Ziff contends. Although some works certainly partake of such a self-satisfied view of the American scene, others frequently struggle with the place of America in relation to other nations and, as this dissertation shows, the place of America in relation to the land it occupies. Indeed, given its proximity to what Americans conceived as "home," the American wilderness may be considered an even more pressing "testing ground" for assumptions about home and nation—and the problems it posed were very different from those presented by European travel, for the American wilderness was far from the cultured, refined social landscape of Europe. While European travel was the primary (and privileged) way of exploring definitions of home and abroad, domestic American travel—along with the texts it produced—was the site at which stable distinctions between home and nature broke down. Either as settlers or as tourists, travelers in nineteenth-century America often had to confront a geographical space that posed fundamental challenges to their conceptions of self, home, community, and nation. Domestic American travel literature allowed authors and travelers to negotiate this

uncertain terrain by representing it in ways that silenced, reconciled, or otherwise incorporated it into a working definition of the American “home” space—one that was always being contested, constructed, and reconstructed.

Even in critical studies that do discuss domestic American travel, there is a noticeable tendency to valorize those travel texts mainly as means toward greater *fictional* literary achievements. While, on the one hand, recognizing the influence travel writing has exerted on the development of fiction implicitly acknowledges the value of the genre, on the other, the study of that influence has often resulted in a hierarchy between travel literature and fictional literature. For example, in his celebration of “the adventurous muse,” William Spengemann is ultimately more interested in travel as a muse, as the vehicle through which authors discovered a poetics that would eventually figure in the great fictional works of the American Renaissance.⁶ In contrast to such an approach, this dissertation largely addresses travel literature as a genre important in its own right—as a crucial site where authors are uniquely situated to negotiate the concepts of home and wilderness as they develop throughout nineteenth-century America. Thus, for example, while I gesture toward *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to indicate how the themes Mark Twain handles in *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi* resonate with his fictional work, my focus throughout remains on the travel texts themselves.

Although an impressive amount of critical work has been done in exploring the opposition between “home” and “abroad” as it influences American travel in Europe

⁶ Spengemann acknowledges the “ongoing dialogue between American travel-writing and modern literature” (2), and he calls for “far more systematic study and closer critical attention” to the “literature of discovery” (5). Ultimately, however, his critical focus remains on the *influence* of travel literature on poetry and fiction, and thus his work suggests that poetry and fiction occupy a more elevated literary status than travel literature occupies.

during this period, significantly less attention has been paid to the experiences of Americans encountering the wilderness within the confines of their national home. Bruce Greenfield's *Narrating Discovery* perhaps comes closest to touching upon this issue. Comparing the rhetoric of British and American explorers of North America, Greenfield argues that while British travelers acknowledged the native peoples of the lands they encountered, American explorers figured that land as an empty natural space to be filled by the advancement of the United States. My project builds indirectly on Greenfield's assertions about the rhetoric of domestic travel literature, showing rather how the wilderness encountered by travelers is sometimes figured in domestic terms—represented less as an empty space to be filled than as a home to be inhabited. These figures of the wilderness as home occur along a spectrum of attitudes, ranging from a materialist view of nature as a resource to be harnessed and exploited by human intervention to a more radical view of nature for its own sake. This dissertation offers, then, an argument that adds to and builds on our current understanding of American travel literature.

While much of the impulse behind this project lies in my reaction against the tendencies of recent work on American travel literature, in its focus on the concepts of wilderness and home in American culture, this dissertation also engages the ongoing ecocritical turn in literary studies. Cheryll Glotfelty explains ecocriticism in her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*:

Despite the broad scope of inquiry and disparate levels of sophistication, all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman. (xix)

In a broad sense, then, this dissertation rests on an ecocritical perspective. Indeed, one might also say that the domestic American travel literature of the nineteenth century was an ecocritical endeavor itself. As my analysis of the individual texts shows, these authors were fundamentally concerned with the interconnections between nature and culture, and their representations of the American wilderness often cast it not as an otherworld opposed to their conceptions of home, but rather as an extension of or version of those images of home.

While the ecocritical approach has blossomed particularly over the past fifteen years,⁷ its roots can be traced to earlier work on wilderness, pastoralism, and images of the land, particularly Nash's *Wilderness and the American Mind*, Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*, and Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land*. In his seminal book, Nash offers one of the most comprehensive studies of the idea of wilderness in American literary and cultural history, tracing the concept's roots from its Old World origins to its development through the Colonial and Revolutionary periods and into nineteenth- and twentieth-century America. Acknowledging the problems inherent in defining "wilderness" unambiguously,⁸ Nash proposes "a spectrum of conditions or environments ranging from the purely wild on the one end to the purely civilized on the other—from the primeval to the paved" (6). Complementing Nash's focus on the

⁷ Michael P. Branch and Scott Slovic, in their introduction to *The ISLE Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993–2003*, offer a survey of the emergence of ecocriticism, the development of the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), and the history of the association's official journal, *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*. Steven Rosendale and Cheryll Glotfelty also provide useful overviews of environmental literary criticism.

⁸ Nash suggests that one strategy for defining the term is to focus on "belief rather than actuality" (6), centering "not so much on what wilderness is but what men *think* it is" (5). For Nash, however, such an approach "makes definition an individual matter and hence no definition at all" (6). He thus proposes his spectrum of environments as a potential solution to this definitional problem. For more on the etymology and definitions of wilderness, see Nash 1–7.

wilderness, Marx's study of "the pastoral ideal in America" identifies the powerful effect that the middle of such a spectrum has had on American literature and thought. Nash likewise noted the importance of this middle landscape, as it was often contrasted with the pure wilderness. In this context, the rural became an ideal: where the wilderness suggested the ongoing threat of an unsubdued nature, the rural revealed man's control over nature (Nash 30–31). Writing about the attractiveness of pastoralism, Marx suggests that "this impulse gives rise to a symbolic motion away from centers of civilization toward their opposite, nature, away from sophistication toward simplicity, or, to introduce the cardinal metaphor of the literary mode, away from the city toward the country" (9–10). Marx's title calls attention to the ways in which these oppositions break down, for the machine's sudden appearance in the garden complicates traditional pastoral imagery of an "unspoiled" nature. Much as Nash traces the evolution of American attitudes toward the wilderness, so does Marx reveal the ways in which American authors have variously addressed this opposed images of the garden and the machine, what he labels the "root conflict of our culture" (365).

Kolodny likewise focuses on the pastoral impulse in American literary history, arguing that representations of the land as a female figure express

what is probably America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction. (4)

Kolodny traces the development of such images of the land from moments of maternal communion to episodes of sexual aggression and violence. "[I]nsofar as Western civilization involves a patriarchal social organization within which separate male-

centered families compete,” she writes, “all movement into unsettled areas inevitably implies conquest and mastery” (133). During the nineteenth century, Kolodny continues, authors “converted the pastoral possibility into the exclusive prerogative of a single male figure, living out a highly eroticized and intimate relationship with a landscape at once suggestively sexual, but overwhelmingly maternal” (134). To be sure, elements of such a masculine aggression toward the land persist throughout the domestic American travel literature of the nineteenth century. For instance, when Bayard Taylor, assessing the emerging fecundity of the Colorado plains, announces that “It almost seems as if Nature were in the habit of making a last desperate attempt to resist the subjugation of her wild, unploughed domains” (42), he perhaps epitomizes this eroticized violence against the earth.⁹ However, another current flows through Taylor’s text and through this travel literature more broadly. Often, nature is neither simply subjected to a masculine aggression that tames the wilderness nor wholly eroticized as a site of feminine communion or gratification. Rather, the authors of these texts imagine the wilderness as a complex terrain that is both open to human development and resistant to such use. Moreover, each of these authors relates to the American wilderness as a potential home—one that, as Gary Snyder suggests, remains equally familiar and unfamiliar, both distant from civilization but inherently connected to it, both the site of community and of violence.

Much like Snyder’s contention about nature as home, Nash’s spectrum of environments and Marx’s study of the machine in the garden allow us to conceive of the

⁹ Henry David Thoreau’s portrayal of his communion with nature as being like “suck[ing] at the very teats of Nature’s pine-clad bosom” (*Maine Woods* 35) is certainly representative of a suggestively sexual and overwhelmingly maternal image.

relationships between nature/home and wilderness/civilization not in purely oppositional terms but in ways that explore their fundamental links. As Vera Norwood points out, “Nature and culture are interactive processes: human culture is affected by the landscape as well as effecting change on it” (334). That interaction is precisely the subject of this dissertation, and I build on Marx’s study by shifting the focus from the appearance of the industrial machine in the garden to the emergence of a domestic home in the wilderness. Similarly, I extend Kolodny’s work on the erotic imagery of the land through my attention to what might be called the domestic imagery of the wilderness, imagery that is not always as erotically charged as that which Kolodny calls our attention to. For the most part, the authors included in this study desire not to displace nature but rather to place themselves in it, and that desire is markedly different from the yearning to occupy the middle ground of pastoralism. That is, these travel texts do not simply seek to domesticate the wilderness and thereby to re-create in its place a stable sense of home in a controlled, rural landscape. Rather, these authors often seek to feel at home in a nature, to borrow Thoreau’s phrase, “not yet subdued to man” (“Walking” 611). Indeed, my overarching argument in this dissertation is that these authors of nineteenth-century domestic American travel literature articulate an occasionally radical sense of the continuity between home and wilderness—a position that often moves them closer to the “primeval” than to the “paved.”

In conceiving of nature as home and acknowledging the inevitable human presence in nature, Snyder indirectly calls attention to what William Cronon, in “The Trouble with Wilderness,” has labeled the myth of wilderness purity. According to this myth, Cronon contends, wilderness has been seen as “the natural, unfallen antithesis of an

unnatural civilization that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives. Most of all, it is the ultimate landscape of authenticity” (80). The problem with such a view of the wilderness, however, is that it idealizes the natural world and elides previous human presence, much as the pastoral ideal tries in vain to erase the nagging presence of the machine in the garden. As Greg Garrard elaborates:

[T]he ideal wilderness space is wholly pure by virtue of its independence from humans, but the ideal wilderness narrative posits a human subject whose most authentic experience is located precisely there. This model not only misrepresents the wild, but also exonerates us from taking a responsible approach to our everyday lives: our working and domestic lives are effectively irredeemable alongside this ideal, so the activities we carry out there escape scrutiny. (70–71)

Although several of the texts I analyze in the chapters that follow do occasionally articulate versions of this myth of wilderness purity, each of these works is also deeply concerned with exploring responsible approaches to living in nature. The American wilderness is conceived not only in idealistic but also in realistic terms, and the tension between these perspectives often provides the impetus for the authors’ ongoing adaptation to their natural surroundings.

If questions about the concept of wilderness have been a defining theme of much ecocritical work, the genre of nature writing has been its primary focus of study. In *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature*, Patrick D. Murphy suggests that a “nonfictional prejudice” exists in ecocriticism. This prejudice, Murphy argues, “arises from the idea that fiction is somehow incapable of conveying facts and real experience” (26–27). He contends that the traditional focus on nonfiction and traditional realism “may in part result from a desire to accept the referentiality of such texts as a

given rather than a problem” (18). To the degree that this dissertation focuses on travel literature written by authors who base their texts on their experiences while traveling through the United States, it may be said to reinforce the nonfictional prejudice that Murphy criticizes. However, I do not approach these texts with a naïve assumption that they offer some transparent, unmediated account of those experiences. Each of the works I discuss, after all, is a carefully constructed work shaped by its author, and thus I approach them as aesthetic products rather than as records of a readily identifiable “real experience.” My interest ultimately is in how these authors *represent* their relationships to the wilderness and the home, and travel literature provides a particularly vital site where those relationships are explored. For me, for instance, whether Henry David Thoreau’s experiences on Mount Katahdin in Maine “really” happened as he records them in “Ktaadn” is beside the point, because his representation of those experiences is, to borrow from Thoreau, the “matter to which I am bound” (*Maine Woods* 95).

Insomuch that both Murphy and I argue for expanding the purview of the current critical discussion of texts that address the relationship between humans and nature, my aim in this dissertation actually accords with Murphy’s project. Just as he wants to shift ecocriticism’s too-exclusive focus on nonfictional texts to works of fiction and poetry,¹⁰ so too, as I have pointed out, do I contend that we must widen our consideration of nineteenth-century American travel writing to include greater attention to documents of domestic travel. Indeed, given their central concern with the relationship between humans

¹⁰ Branch and Slovic also argue for an “expansive conception” of ecocriticism: “We believe that every literary work can be read from a ‘green’ perspective, and that linguistic, conceptual, and analytical frameworks developed in any nonliterary discipline may be incorporated into an ecocritical reading” (xix).

and their natural environment, it is surprising that more ecocritical scholars have not addressed the role that the domestic travel literature of the nineteenth century played in shaping American ideas of the wilderness, nature, home, and nation.

As my ongoing discussion of the idea of wilderness and of ecocritical approaches to literature suggests, this dissertation is also fundamentally concerned with rethinking definitions of “home” and the “domestic” in nineteenth-century American culture. Indeed, as the title of my project implies, the “domestic” is far from a stable category, signifying at once the national “home” defined by its political boundaries and a local “home” defined by the individual. The notion of “domestic American travel literature” captures precisely the negotiation between these two senses of home, and as I argue throughout this project, that negotiation often takes shape in dialogue with America’s wilderness environment. In this way, this dissertation enables us to reconsider not only the roles of the wilderness in nineteenth-century American life but also the multiple roles and meanings the domestic contained during the period. For instance, while Amy Kaplan has recently suggested that we should reconceptualize the concept of domesticity “not as a static condition but as the process of domestication,” a process that is continually defining the borders between “home” and “foreign” and consolidating power through the implied hierarchy in such an act of definition (“Manifest Domesticity” 582), I try to suggest the ways in which authors conceive of domestication not as an act of mastering the landscape or civilizing an other but as a process of acclimating themselves to an idea of being at home in nature. The first part of my title, Thoreau’s exclamation about the Maine wilderness at the end of “Ktaadn,” captures precisely that ideal, one that I trace through the other texts studied here.

In arguing that domestic American travel literature redefines the wilderness as a potential home that carries both personal and national significances for these authors, I reveal the continuities not only between nineteenth-century conceptions of nature and home but also between the literary movements of the century. Understood in the context of Caroline Kirkland's treatment of nature in *A New Home—Who'll Follow?*, for instance, Thoreau's more radical relationship with the natural world can be seen less as a clear break with his contemporaries than as an extension of their work. Similarly, in its own portrayal of the possibilities of constructing a sense of being at home in nature, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Bits of Travel at Home* is clearly indebted to the works of Kirkland and Thoreau. In outlining such interconnections among these works of domestic travel literature, we can simultaneously trace the influences that romanticism and transcendentalism exert on the tradition of local color realism.

Ultimately, then, this dissertation adds to existing travel literature scholarship and ecocritical discussions of nineteenth-century American literature (a) by addressing a set of texts that has been undervalued for its contributions to American thinking about the relationship between humans and nature in particular and to American literary history in general; (b) by analyzing the interconnections that exist not only among these less-studied texts but also between them and their better-known fictional counterparts; and most importantly, (c) by offering a new understanding of nineteenth-century representations of the fundamental connection between the American wilderness and the home and the various roles that relationship played in American literature and culture.

Because travel literature was wildly popular in the nineteenth century, I could conceivably have focused on any number of texts and a wider period of American

history. I begin with Washington Irving and the 1830s, however, for two important reasons. First, this period marks what we might identify as the beginning of rapid expansion and the maturation of leisure travel within the U.S. Second, since the domestic travel literature of this period has not been acknowledged for its significant role in shaping American ideas of home and wilderness, I have selected texts that can be placed in relief against the better-known, canonical works of the period. Irving, largely recognized as one of America's first "professional" authors, thus provides a reasonable point of departure for my exploration, and Henry David Thoreau and Mark Twain provide similar anchors for my overall argument. Likewise, each of the authors I examine is known primarily for works other than the ones I discuss here, and so my analyses not only add to our understanding of the travel literature of this period but also offer crucial ways in which we can reconsider each of these authors and their respective oeuvres. Thus, in focusing on less-known works by major authors of the nineteenth century, I hope to lay the foundation for a more widespread recovery of the domestic travel literature by lesser-known authors.

The chapters of this dissertation proceed in a chronological fashion, as I move from the travel literature of the 1830s to that of the 1870s and 1880s. Except for my chapter on Thoreau, each of the chapters pairs two authors in an effort to contrast more clearly their conceptions of the wilderness/home relationship. Thus, for example, I situate Bayard Taylor's *Colorado* against George William Curtis's *Lotus-Eating* in order to reveal how both authors engage the nascent tourism industry in the United States but arrive at very different forms of American nationalism. Thoreau serves as his own foil, to some degree, for I suggest that "A Winter Walk" and "Ktaadn" as serve as a crucial

context for *Walden*, and my discussions of the other authors often employ Thoreau as a frame of reference. Indeed, given his stature as a central figure in criticism about American responses to nature, Thoreau necessarily stands at the core of this project as well. However, what I highlight here is not so much his difference from his contemporaries as his continuities with them. Certainly, Thoreau provides us with an “extreme statement” that figures the wilderness as home, but as I show, other authors were likewise offering their own extreme visions.

Chapter 1 offers a comparative analysis of Washington Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835) and Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?* (1839), both of which explore America’s nascent expansion into the previous wilderness of the west. Arguing that Irving’s *Tour* celebrates the author’s return “home” to America even as it exposes the failure of the prairies to be a home for Irving, I go on to demonstrate how Kirkland, in contrast, successfully negotiates the natural and social worlds of her new rural Michigan home. Whereas Irving’s text represents the slow breakdown of community in response to the hardships of the natural world, Kirkland’s work portrays her narrator’s successful fusion of the domestic and wilderness areas to sustain first the larger community of her town and second a community of her readership. Chapter 2 extends my interest in this negotiation between wilderness and the home by analyzing how Thoreau fuses the natural world with his own developing notion of home. Using “Walking, or The Wild” as an entry point, I turn to a close analysis of two of Thoreau’s travel texts, “A Winter Walk” (1843) and “Ktaadn” (1848). “A Winter Walk” is often

regarded primarily for its evocation of domesticity, but I argue that it anticipates in many ways several of Thoreau's more radical ideas about the fundamental link between nature and home, ideas also articulated in the later narrative "Ktaadn" and, of course, in *Walden*.

Building on my examinations of Irving, Kirkland, and Thoreau, Chapter 3 focuses on two texts of nature tourism, George William Curtis's *Lotus-Eating: A Summer Book* (1852) and Bayard Taylor's *Colorado: A Summer Trip* (1868). Using Marx's notion of the "technological sublime" to frame my analysis, I contend that Curtis and Taylor employ a similar rhetoric to achieve very different ends with their texts. Like their predecessors, these texts are deeply concerned about the nationalist implications of the American landscape—implications that are themselves tied to the development of a tourist infrastructure in the United States. Both authors focus on the ways in which human intervention can "improve" Nature, but their texts differ widely in assessing the success of such improvement. I argue that while Curtis constructs the East Coast tourist sites he visits as surrogate homes, he nevertheless remains fundamentally alienated from them and views the American landscape as a failure in comparison to that of Europe. In contrast, Taylor's *Colorado* suggests that the proper development of the Rocky Mountains may not only reunify the United States in the wake of the Civil War but also confirm the nation's international significance.

Chapter 4 examines works by Mark Twain and Helen Hunt Jackson to show how both authors approach the problem of fashioning a sense of home in various locales. In *Roughing It* (1872), Twain expresses a desire for home that is contradicted by his incessant urge to leave that home, and in *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), he articulates a nostalgic yearning for a connection to a home Twain now recognizes is unattainable. In

contrast to Twain's constant sense of dislocation, Jackson's *Bits of Travel at Home* (1878) employs the notion of transplantation as it asserts her sense of being at home everywhere. Finally, my Coda suggests ways in which the focus of my argument can be expanded chronologically both earlier to the formation of the United States and later into the 1890s and beyond and extended topically into a cultural study of the late 1800s boom of grand hotels situated in wilderness destinations as well as into a study of the landscape painting of the period. Thus, I conclude by suggesting that, while my project maps the relationships between wilderness and home in nineteenth-century domestic American travel literature, critics still have other places to visit—that there remain in this territory, to borrow from Gary Snyder, more familiar and less familiar places that deserve to be explored further.

CHAPTER 1

“HOME ON THE OUTSKIRTS OF CIVILIZATION”: NATION, NATURE, AND COMMUNITY IN WASHINGTON IRVING AND CAROLINE KIRKLAND

Published just four years apart, Washington Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835) and Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?* (1839) share a deep concern with constructing a sense of home out of the frontier environment of the American West. Although the two texts focus on very different regions (Irving’s on the American Indian territories that would eventually become the states of Kansas and Oklahoma, and Kirkland’s on the upper Midwest state of Michigan), both works address the central problem of American expansionism and the need to transform the wilderness into an inhabitable home. That transformation is very much a nationalist project, and both authors are well aware of the national import of their travels. Indeed, Irving’s “tour” was made under the aegis of the War Department’s Commission of Indian Affairs: he accompanied Commissioner Henry Ellsworth and a detachment of troops as they surveyed both the Indians and the land.¹ While Kirkland’s “new home” arose out of less official circumstances, it was no less expansionist in focus: her narrator, Mrs. Mary

¹ For more on the Commission of Indian Affairs and the circumstances surrounding Ellsworth and Irving’s tour of the prairies, see Peter Antelytes’s *Tales of Adventurous Enterprise* 53–55. “In the end,” Antelytes writes, “the true focus of concern of this ‘Indian’ commission, and of Indian removal in general, was finally not Indians at all. From the first the object was the acquisition of land” (54). John Francis McDermott’s edition of *A Tour on the Prairies* also provides invaluable context for Irving’s tour, particularly through comparisons between Irving’s text and the journals of his traveling companions.

Clavers, is the wife of the founder of a new town in Michigan, and the question posed by her title obviously situates the work as a call for others to follow her westward emigration. Detailing an actual relocation to Michigan rather than recreational travel through the area, Kirkland's text exists on a border between travel literature and local-color regionalism. Because Mrs. Clavers's experiences largely rely on her movement from New York to backwoods Michigan, and because her immersion in local life is carried out with a touristic sensibility that relies on her continued movement around her new locale, I approach *A New Home* as a travel text, even though it does not conclude with the typical return to the original point of departure.

Despite what Irving and Kirkland share in their engagement with America's early westward expansion, their texts diverge in telling ways—in the travels that form their bases and, most notably, in their respective treatments of the American landscape itself and their representation of the possibility of creating a new home in the natural world. In this chapter, I argue that Irving's narrative traces his progressive alienation from the land through which he travels, whereas Kirkland's text details a unifying impulse that ultimately fuses wilderness with home. Although Irving attempts to reclaim an identification with America as his homeland through *A Tour on the Prairies*, his text underscores the limits of that "home." While he initially portrays the Oklahoma prairies as a surrogate home and his tour as a successful experiment in acculturation, Irving is ultimately forced to recognize the failures of that process—he becomes, as it were, homeless on the prairies, and *A Tour* closes with his hasty return to the human settlements of the eastern United States. In contrast, in *A New Home—Who'll Follow?*

Kirkland recounts the successful adaptation of Mrs. Clavers from being an urban easterner to becoming one of “us nor’westers” (86) of rural Michigan. Kirkland figures that adaptation not only through Mrs. Clavers’s relationship to her new neighbors but also through her relationship to her new natural surroundings. Mrs. Clavers’s entry into the backwoods community of Montacute, Michigan, results then in her extension of that community to her readership, a rhetorical gesture of nation-building through which Kirkland suggests the power that women on the frontier have to help shape the nation’s future.

Comparing Irving and Kirkland enables me to identify competing conceptions of the American wilderness that persist throughout the domestic travel literature of the mid-nineteenth century. These two vying representations clearly emerge from a close study of Irving’s *Tour* and Kirkland’s *A New Home*, and we can trace their respective lineage through later works that similarly explore the wilderness as a site of alienation from or as a place of inhabitation of home and nation. This chapter thus establishes several of the themes that will resurface in later chapters, as I consider, for example, how authors such as Henry David Thoreau, Bayard Taylor, and Helen Hunt Jackson expand on Kirkland’s sense of nature as home, or how authors like George William Curtis and Mark Twain echo Irving’s sense of dislocation in relation to home and nature. More specifically, contrasting Irving and Kirkland highlights the versions of national identity these authors construct out of their encounters with the American wilderness and reveals the strikingly different attitudes toward the land that emerge out of those encounters.

Returning Home:
Washington Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies*

Expatriated from the United States for seventeen years, Washington Irving returned to his “native land” in 1832. During his time in Europe, Irving solidified his reputation as one of America’s foremost authors, particularly through the popular success of *The Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gentleman* (1819–1820), a text that largely focuses on Europe’s “storied and poetical association[s]” (14).² Irving’s sojourn in Europe, however, also resulted in his reputation as having become *too* European in his sensibilities. As Geoffrey Crayon proclaims at the outset of *The Sketch Book*, “My native country was full of youthful promise: Europe was rich in the accumulated treasures of age. . . . I will visit this land of wonders, thought I, and see the gigantic race from which I am degenerated” (14–15). Of course, Crayon’s statement is partly ironic, mocking this “gigantic race” of Europeans even as he sets up the Old World as a treasure trove of culture. Nevertheless, the European focus of *The Sketch Book* called into question Irving’s American-ness. The time away from his native land rendered Irving insufficiently American in the public eye³—and on his return in 1832 Irving set out to remedy that misperception. As Irving notes as early as an 1829 letter, “I feel the importance . . . and I may say the duty, of <writing> producing some writings relating to our own country which would be of a decidedly national character. It . . . would be at the same time very gratifying to my feelings and advantageous to my literary character at home” (qtd. in Antelytes 49). Irving’s characterization of his need to write as a “duty”

² For more on Irving’s reputation among his contemporaries, see Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky’s *Adrift in the Old World*, particularly chapter 2.

³ Rubin-Dorsky cites, for instance, Edward Everett’s contemporary American review of *The Sketch Book*, which laments the work’s failure to address “topics purely American” (40–41).

suggests his role as author-citizen: in writing of his nation, he may not only celebrate that homeland but also assure his acceptance there. The first of those writings to be published was Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies* (1835), which was the first volume of his three-volume *Crayon Miscellany* and the only one of the miscellany to focus on the United States.⁴

The account of Irving's five-week excursion into the "debatable ground" (*Tour* 10) of American Indian hunting territories,⁵ *A Tour on the Prairies* represents Washington Irving's attempt to reconnect with his home and his nation in the wake of his repatriation. As Jeffrey Rubin-Dorsky has pointed out, a "feeling of homelessness continually haunt[ed] Irving" (xiv), and even during his years in Europe, Irving "was continually preoccupied with the idea of home" (27). Irving attempts his reconnection by entering a geographical space that is at the time neither "home" nor "nation,"⁶ a fact that Peter Antelytes labels the "central irony" (99) of the text. Nevertheless, concepts of home and national identity pervade Irving's travels through this officially designated Indian Territory, partly because, as Antelytes has aptly shown, this territory was intimately connected to notions of American expansionism and a nascent manifest destiny.⁷ Indeed,

⁴ The other volumes of *Crayon Miscellany* contain *Abbotsford* and *Newstead Abbey* (in vol. 2), which recount visits to the estates of Walter Scott and Lord Byron, respectively, and *Legends of the Conquest of Spain* (in vol. 3).

While Geoffrey Crayon is the constructed literary persona of Washington Irving, I use "Irving" as a shorthand to describe the I who narrates both *The Sketch Book* and *A Tour*. The values and beliefs of Crayon seem to me to be sufficiently close to Irving himself so as to enable such a collapse: Crayon is roughly equivalent to Irving as implied author, and so for ease of reference and to avoid confusion I will refer to Irving rather than to Crayon.

⁵ These debatable grounds are portions of the present-day states of Kansas and Oklahoma. For a detailed map of Irving's route, see John Francis McDermott's edition of *A Tour on the Prairies* (x1).

⁶ As Irving describes it in his introduction, the tour consists of "a month's foray beyond the outposts of human habitation, into the wilderness of the Far West" (9).

⁷ In addition to Antelytes's book, Stephanie LeMenager's article usefully situates Irving's western writings in relationship to the commercial interests that defined the Far West in the 1830s and 1840s.

as Amy Kaplan argues in *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture*, there is a “spatial and political interdependence of home and empire.” The domestic, Kaplan writes, has “a double meaning that links the space of the familial household to that of the nation, by imagining both in opposition to everything outside the geographic and conceptual borders of the home.” As Kaplan describes it, “imperial domesticity” enables a nationalist expansion that “entails conquering and taming the wild, the natural, the alien”; the domestic thus becomes part and parcel of the “imperial project of civilizing” (25–26). Irving’s concern with images of home in *A Tour on the Prairies* can thus be read not only for their personal significance for Irving but also for the larger sociopolitical context that frames his reconnection with his native land. Tracing the progression of Irving’s gradual acclimation to frontier life and culminating with his hasty return to human civilization, *A Tour on the Prairies* insists upon Irving’s return “home” to America even as it ultimately reveals his failure to feel at home on the prairies.

Given Irving’s intention to write a text of a “decidedly national character,” *A Tour on the Prairies* might best be first approached through a brief consideration of *The Sketch Book*. Although it contains “Rip Van Winkle” and “The Legend of Sleepy Hollow” (perhaps Irving’s two best recognized pieces set in America), as well as two essays about American Indian character, *The Sketch Book* is comprised primarily of sketches of English life and scraps of Continental folklore. As such, it stands in relatively stark contrast to the decidedly national text Irving planned to write upon his return to America. Significantly, Irving’s “Author’s Introduction” to the first American edition of *A Tour on the Prairies* establishes a direct relationship between this later text and *The Sketch Book*,

situating *A Tour on the Prairies* as its stateside complement. If *The Sketch Book* (primarily) represented Irving's tribute to European (and especially English) culture and resulted in his de-Americanization, *A Tour* offers an exact counterforce to Irving's earlier journey into the past by positioning itself as a journey into the future of the United States.

Opening with a lengthy quotation of Irving's "The Voyage," a piece from *The Sketch Book* that expresses his anticipations and anxieties regarding his European travels, the introduction to *A Tour on the Prairies* immediately seeks to answer criticism of Irving's "voluntary exile from [his] home" (3) by explaining his motives. Detailing the "reverse of fortunes" he met in England and characterizing his subsequent years as a "path . . . too often beset by thorns," Irving enlists readerly sympathy for the economic situation that, he implies, forced him to protract his stay in Europe. Rather than indulging in the rich cultural opportunities Europe afforded him, "I was in fact shut up from society, battling with cares and perplexities, and almost struggling for subsistence," Irving explains (4). This self-portrait of the struggling artist is meant to correct the public (mis)perception of Irving as an ostentatious, successful, Europeanized author, a misperception that led to speculation about Irving's patriotism and about his real reasons for remaining absent from the United States.⁸

While Irving's portrayal of himself as a struggling artist who is also the victim of a curious reading public's wild speculation seeks to justify his seventeen-year expatriation, Irving also attempts to enlist readers' sympathies for the trials he must go through in his repatriation. Irving disavows precisely these motives: "Let not the reader

⁸ The first several paragraphs of Irving's introduction reiterate numerous times the psychological torment these "painful doubts and surmises" have on the author, in addition to the extract I discuss below.

be mistaken. I have no doleful picture to draw; no sorrowful demand to make upon his sympathies” (7). But the effect of Irving’s introduction runs counter to such a proclamation, which comes immediately after Irving has drawn for us just such a “doleful picture.” Casting himself as a Rip Van Winkle figure, Irving describes the anxieties he faced in returning home:

Yet I will confess, that the arrow which had been planted in my heart, rankled and festered there. The corroding doubt that had been infused in my waking thoughts, affected my sleeping fancies. The return to my country, so long anticipated, became the constant subject of harassing dreams. I would fancy myself arrived in my native city, but the place would be so changed that I would not recognise it. I would wander through strange streets, meet with strange faces, and find every thing strange around me: or, what was worse, I would meet with those I loved, with my kindred, and the companions of my youth, but they no longer knew me, or passed me by with neglect. I cannot tell how often I have awakened from such dreary dreams, and felt a sadness at heart for hours afterwards. (6)

Irving’s language in this “confession” emphasizes the doleful nature of his predicament. The “corroding doubt” and “harassing dreams” culminate in Irving’s inability to narrate the extent of his anxiety (“I cannot tell how often”), dramatizing for the reader the struggle Irving faces because of his unwanted absence from his native city and his inevitable alienation from that hometown upon his return.⁹ That feared alienation immediately manifests itself upon Irving’s actual return to the United States, where his Van Winkle-like dreams become reality. “I passed through places that ought to be familiar to me,” Irving reports, “but all were changed. . . . As I passed on, I looked wistfully in every face: not one was known to me—not one! . . . The saddening

⁹ Irving’s language of alienation can be linked to Sigmund Freud’s concept of the uncanny, something long known but rendered alien through the process of repression (142). I discuss this concept in greater detail in my analysis of Mark Twain’s *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi* in chapter 4.

conviction stole over my heart that I was a stranger in my own home!” (6–7). Much as he does in his earlier characterization of his time in Europe, Irving again constructs himself as yearning for a connection to America that somehow evades his grasp.

Irving’s introduction to *A Tour* is part doleful picture of alienation and part contented picture of successful repatriation—and, indeed, the two parts combine to form a coherent narrative that works to (re)establish Irving’s status as an American author. Although the new American scene initially overwhelms him, Irving overcomes that disorientation quickly and reimmerses himself in the community of friends he feared would begrudge his European sojourn.¹⁰ The welcome he receives from his friends—and, by extension, the welcome he receives from the “countrymen” who “still believe and trust in me” (8)—confirms for Irving his return: “Then it was that I felt I was indeed at home—and that it was a home of the heart!” (7). Irving’s sense of being at home is thus directly linked to his relationship with his readership. Reassuring his readers that he is “heart and soul among them” (8), Irving ends his explanation of his lengthy absence from America with a patriotic confirmation of his ties to nation and home: “I have seen what is brightest and best in foreign lands, and have found, in every nation, enough to love and honour; yet, with all these recollections living in my imagination and kindling in my heart, I look round with delightful exultation upon my native land, and feel that, after all my ramblings about the world, I can be happiest at home” (8). Throughout his “Author’s Introduction,” Irving figures his relationship to his home and to his audience in sentimental terms, emphasizing numerous times the role of the heart in relation to the

¹⁰ Though it is outside the scope of this project, Henry James’s *The American Scene* (1907) similarly reassesses the author’s impressions of America after returning from Europe.

home. Whereas earlier his heart had been “rankled” by an arrow of doubt regarding his return home, his welcome reception heals any perceived wound. Indeed, his “festering” and “corroding” condition gives way to an assurance not only that Irving is home but, more importantly, that it is a “home *of the heart*.” Sentimentalizing his relationship to America enables Irving to heighten the drama of his repatriation, to figure himself as the happily returned native son who must now continue to reclaim his American identity by touring his homeland. That tour, however, partly undermines Irving’s repatriation by exposing his inability to conceive of the prairies as home.

As I have shown, most of Irving’s “Author’s Introduction” explains the conditions of his seventeen years in Europe and allays concerns about his suspect American-ness. In underscoring Irving’s nationalism, those aims are implicitly connected to the subject matter of *A Tour*: in many ways, Irving’s tour is an account of “looking round” his “native land” and exploring whether he can be “happiest at home.” But Irving also turns rather abruptly to an explicit discussion of the immediate context for his present volume. After the patriotic flourish that concludes his repatriation narrative, Irving shifts gears: “And now a word or two with respect to the volume here presented to the reader” (8).¹¹ Significantly, Irving casts his decision to publish *A Tour* as an attempt to satisfy not his own artistic aims but the desires of an interested reading public.¹² Being conventionally modest about the appeal of his book, Irving admits that it has “nothing wonderful or

¹¹ This shift marks the break between Irving’s original introduction, which was very short, and his introduction to the revised first American edition, which includes the author’s account of his time in Europe. Irving explains that he “was induced, while the work was printing, to modify the introduction” so as to include his reflections on returning to America (*Tour* 8n3).

¹² Martha Dula notes the pressures exerted on Irving to produce a new batch of sketches from his highly reported travels, and Peter Antelytes and Heiner Bus note the various contemporary newspaper reports of “the Irving party” and anticipation of a new set of sketches to be derived from these travels. For an account of contemporary audience responses to Irving’s published *Tour*, see Dula.

adventurous to offer.” It is “a simple narrative of every day occurrences; such as happen to every one who travels the prairies” (9). Such a tactic both satisfies readers’ expectations and sets those expectations low; Irving gives his readers the account they seek, but it is an account that he claims will not contain the adventure and wonder typically associated with westering narratives.¹³

Washington Irving’s appeals in his introduction—first to readerly sympathy, and then to readerly desire—construct a framework for understanding *A Tour on the Prairies* as Irving’s reassertion of his identity as an American author of American material for an American audience. That identity takes shape around Irving’s various representations of home, as he tries to reconnect with his nation by touring the territory it will soon annex and by temporarily inhabiting a landscape otherwise unsettled by either white settlers or Indians. Irving’s *Tour* traces a narrative arc in which we see the author grow increasingly accustomed to prairie life only to end up battered and exhausted by its hardships.

From the outset of *A Tour on the Prairies*, Irving emphasizes the remoteness of the territory through which he plans to travel. “Several hundred miles beyond the Mississippi” (10), this land is also a region “where no party of white men had as yet penetrated” (17). Irving is likewise careful to call attention to this area’s status as “uninhabited country, where there is neither to be seen the log house of the white man, nor the wigwam of the Indian” (10). In part, this characterization of the land heightens

¹³ In “How the West Won: Irving’s Comic Inversion of the Westering Myth in *A Tour on the Prairies*,” William Bedford Clark discusses the ways in which Irving, despite his disclaimer, nevertheless holds out promise of high adventure to his reader (see esp. 336–39). Similarly, John Joseph contends that the “utterly bland title” of *A Tour* is “suspiciously modest, as though the author dared not oversell the shamelessly dramatized pages within” (130). While Joseph goes a bit far in indicting Irving for such dramatization, his point about the understatement of the title is apt. Like Irving’s disclaimer in the introduction, the title sets readerly expectations for the plot at a relatively low bar.

the potential for adventure in *A Tour*—it implies precisely the type of adventure Irving disavows in his introduction, when he insists he has no “story” to tell. But constructing the Far West as a remote, empty space also enables Irving to dramatize the ways in which his cultivated, Eastern persona comes to terms with that uninhabited country.¹⁴ It is in this emptied West that Irving attempts to reconstruct his sense of home and nation, a reconstruction largely articulated through the scenes of camp life in *A Tour on the Prairies*.

Irving set out from Fort Gibson in early October 1832, accompanied by Henry Ellsworth, Charles Latrobe, Albert-Alexandre Pourtalès, and Antoine (“Tonish”) Deshetres. Irving and his companions originally intended to accompany an Osage hunting party during its fall buffalo hunt, but they arrived at the fort too late to do so. A large company of rangers charged with surveying the land between the Arkansas and Red Rivers and with monitoring American Indian activities in the area was only three days ahead of Irving’s party. The idea of “ranging over these dangerous and interesting regions under the safeguard of a powerful escort” (17) appealed greatly to Irving and his companions. After his small group joins the company of rangers and departs on their mission, Irving provides the first lengthy representation of camp life on the tour. Labeled “the honey camp” because of the numerous “bee-trees” located nearby, this camp is marked by its beauty and its bounty. Irving and his small party have hurried their pace and altered their original itinerary in order to catch up with the company of rangers, and the joyous circumstances of their meeting are reflected in Irving’s portrayal of the scene.

¹⁴ This portrayal of the West as an empty space is precisely the kind of rhetoric Bruce Greenfield analyzes in *Narrating Discovery*, which I discuss in my Introduction.

“It was a wild bandit, or Robin Hood, scene,” he writes. “In a beautiful open forest, traversed by a running stream, were booths of bark, and tents of blankets, temporary shelters from the recent rain, for the rangers commonly bivouac in the open air” (47). Irving’s romanticization of the scene as a “wild bandit” one, his emphasis on the openness of the camp, and his reiteration of its beautiful setting suggest his conception of the west as a harmonious, liberatory landscape. Ironically, he employs the figure of an English folk-hero to evoke this American setting, suggesting the extent to which Irving’s “Englishness” still underwrites his prairie experience. The camp obviously appeals to Irving, for it embodies his fantasy of frontier freedom, which he emphasizes by repeating the adjective “open” in describing the scene.

But while Irving’s depiction of the honey camp revels in its beauty and remoteness, it also indicates the fleeting, tenuous nature of the camp’s status as wild. Indeed, the central event of this camp episode—the felling of a bee-tree to plunder its honey—insists on the territory’s status as being on the verge of civilization. Irving opens chapter 9, entitled “The Bee Hunt,” with a description of the “countless swarms” of bees that have “overspread the Far West, within but a moderate number of years”: they are the “heralds of civilization, steadfastly preceding it as it advance[s] from the Atlantic borders” (50).¹⁵ The presence of these swarms, in their countless numbers and rapid dispersal across the prairies, indicates the coming transformation of this wilderness into a

¹⁵ William Cullen Bryant describes the bee in similar terms in “The Prairies” (1833). The speaker of the poem echoes Irving’s assessment: “I listen long / To his domestic hum, and think I hear / The sound of that advancing multitude / Which soon shall fill these deserts” (ll. 114–17). As with Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies*, the bee in Bryant’s poem signals the coming of Euro-American settlement even as it highlights the fact that these prairies are still un-domesticated. Bryant’s poem concludes with the speaker’s return from reverie to reality: “All at once / A fresher wind sweeps by, and breaks my dream, / And I am in the wilderness alone” (ll. 122–24).

cultivated landscape. They are a sign of the nation's imperial expansion—the consequences of which Irving endorses here even as he notes that American Indians “say that, in proportion as the bee advances, the Indian and the buffalo retire” (50). It is precisely this potential for the land to be cultivated for human use that Irving revels in, as he notes that this is a “land of promise” and a “very paradise,” one that soon could become the pasturage for “herds of cattle as countless as the sands upon the sea-shore” (51). As with his initial description of the bees, Irving emphasizes the “countless” numbers of domesticated animals—and, by extension, a related number of human settlers—that this previously uninhabited land could support.

The realization of that land's promise, however, depends upon its transformation at the hands of the rangers, and the communal life of the honey camp depends upon the rangers' exploitation of a community of honey bees. Describing a bee hunt he witnesses shortly after reaching the camp, Irving constructs the bees and their hives as a mini-community engaged in its own small-scale commerce. Likening the bees to merchantmen pulling into port and unloading their freight, Irving casts the successful “bee hunt” as if it were the “downfall of their republic” (53). Their honey economy shattered, the bees' community likewise fractures; but the bee hunt serves to strengthen the communal ties of the rangers, affording the encampment a supply of honey that fuels the men's mirth.

After the bee hunt, the rangers' encampment is a “scene of the greatest hilarity,” with the men engaged in various “boisterous amusements” (55) and “continual feasting” (57). Irving initially distances himself from the youthful exuberance of most of the enlisted rangers, aligning himself instead with the “graver set” of “sages” and “leaders”

of the company. While the younger members of the company go about their play, this more reserved group contemplates the business of the expedition. However, Irving cannot help but see in the young men of the company the promise of a youthful nation, and in one of the few speculative asides in *A Tour*, Irving expresses the link between prairie life and nationhood. Irving describes the rangers:

They were mostly young men, on their first expedition, in high health and vigor, and buoyant with anticipations; and I can conceive nothing more likely to set the youthful blood into a flow, than a wild wood life of the kind, and the range of a magnificent wilderness, abounding with game, and fruitful of adventure. We send our youth abroad to grow luxurious and effeminate in Europe; it appears to me, that a previous tour on the prairies would be more likely to produce that manliness, simplicity, and self-dependence, most in unison with our political institutions. (55)

Indicting the kind of “effeminate” European tour we might see *The Sketch Book* as representing, Irving contends that the frontier life constructs a rugged (and gendered) individualism vital to the well-being of American political life. To tour the prairie is, to some extent, to undergo a certain form of Americanization, and the company of rangers is a small-scale representation of the young nation itself. Despite being a corps of soldiers organized according to military rank, the rangers are actually a relatively democratic assemblage in terms of socioeconomic class.¹⁶ As Irving notes, “Many of them were neighbors of their officers, and accustomed to regard them with the familiarity of equals and companions” (59). Not professional military men but rather frontier farmers and settlers who had enlisted for only one year, the rangers consistently fail to hold their marching line as they rush after the hunting quarry and adventure they seek from this

¹⁶ Obviously, since this corps consists only of white men, it is limited in its democratic representation. Women and minorities—minus the few guides such as Tonish—are not included, and only then in a marked role as hired help.

expedition. Perhaps more than anything else, though, the rangers' simple frontier way of life stands as *the* representative American way—as precisely that national character that Irving seeks to reestablish for himself.

Of course, though Irving sets up this tour as an exercise in American simplicity, the honey camp is marked by its *luxuries*. Irving insists on the excess of the camp. In addition to the twenty trees the rangers felled for their honey, Irving notes that their camp “abounded with game” and was “overstocked with provisions” (57), enabling them to enjoy a “sumptuous repast” (58). Somewhat paradoxically, the general luxury of the camp enables Irving to begin accommodating himself to the simple frontier life of the prairies. Although throughout *A Tour* Irving does not generally closely identify with the company of the rangers, at the honey camp he decides “to abandon the shelter of a tent, and henceforth to bivouac like the rangers” (61). Like his obvious enjoyment of dining “in hunters’ style,” sleeping in the open air on a “hunters’ couch” of bear skin and blankets signifies for Irving a return to simplicity that also signals his adaptation to this “hunters’ life.”

If the honey camp episode expresses Irving's exuberance and expectation at the outset of his trip, two later camp episodes highlight the toll the tour has taken on the party. The “alarm camp” and the “foul weather encampment” (roughly two weeks after the honey camp) expose the party's diminishing spirits and growing weariness with the length and difficulty of the tour. Where the honey camp was marked by the openness of the forest, as Irving's tour progresses the rangers encounter an increasingly resistant and foreboding landscape. The dense undergrowth and woodlands of the Cross Timber pose a

particular obstacle to the company, and Irving describes his passage through the area as being “like struggling through forests of cast iron” (125). Similarly, the group must “force” its way through a “thick canebrake” before successfully escaping the “mire and water” of this “morass” (123–24). Irving’s shifting description of the landscape highlights the change from a terrain that yields its bounty easily to human intervention to a terrain that fiercely resists the company’s advances. Though the rangers are able to work their way through such landscape, the difficulties of the journey sap their previous “hilarity.” As Irving notes, the company “began to experience the disadvantages of the season” (126), as suitable pasturage for their horses is scant and the few sources of fresh water are drying up in the late fall weather. “The novelty of the expedition was wearing off,” Irving remarks of some of the younger rangers, and the men are “getting as way-worn as their horses” (141). While these hardships of the tour are primarily physical, they also affect the psychological state of the company as a whole, as the events of the “alarm camp” amply demonstrate.

Irving’s description of the alarm camp’s environment sets it in sharp relief against the honey camp. Irving opens chapter 22 of *A Tour* with a paragraph that reveals the contrasts between the two encampments:

We now came to a halt, and had to content ourselves with an indifferent encampment. It was in a grove of scrub-oaks, on the borders of a deep ravine, at the bottom of which were a few scanty pools of water. We were just at the foot of a gradually-sloping hill, covered with half-withered grass, that afforded meagre pasturage. In the spot where we had encamped, the grass was high and parched. The view around us was circumscribed and much shut in by gently-swelling hills. (127)

The difference between the previous spacious, beautiful, and bountiful encampment and this “indifferent” camp marked by its enclosure and scarcity of resources could not be clearer. And while the hills surrounding the camp are “*gently*-swelling,” the sense of confinement here is not one of comfort or security but one of vulnerability. This is not “the primal warmth of womb or breast in a feminine landscape” (Kolodny, *Lay of the Land* 6) but rather an intense, unnerving imprisonment. Whereas the honey camp suggests the promise not only of Irving’s tour but also of the larger, national venture for which that tour is emblematic, the alarm camp suggests that those promises will remain unfulfilled. Indeed, the succession of alarms that provide the camp’s name is fueled first by the poor conditions of the camp itself and then by its limited view of the surrounding countryside—literally, its lack of prospects.

Just as the physical settings for the two camps sharply contrast, so too does the rangers’ behavior in each camp. The rangers are threatened by the prospect of a wildfire shortly after establishing the camp, as kindling from one of their fires ignites the “parched” high grass. Although this fire poses a very real—if brief—threat to their safety, the more significant alarm arises from a series of misperceptions that lead the rangers to believe that they are under attack from a band of Pawnees. Whereas the youthful inexperience of the rangers was something of an attractive virtue at the honey camp, here that lack of experience becomes a significant risk to the company’s safety. The general hilarity of the previous camp gives way to a general anxiety in this camp. It is an anxiety aided and abetted by the camp’s location: “Our situation, shut in among the hills,” Irving explains, “prevented our seeing to any distance, and left us prey to all these rumors”

(130). Whereas the rangers play the role of predator in the honey camp episode, hunting down and plundering the beehives, here they are transformed into prey. But instead of being the prey of some real threat, they are the prey of their own imaginations, imaginations set in motion by the surroundings of the camp.

While Irving assumes that visual evidence would confirm or debunk the validity of these rumors that prey upon the company, it is sight itself that initiates the confusion in the first place. The source of the frantic rumors and alarms is the captain's misreading of two figures he sees on a neighboring ridge. Thinking the two figures are likely Pawnee scouts bent on stealing the company's horses, at best, or on attacking the company itself, at worst, the captain alerts some of his men to gather the horses into camp. Thus begins the series of rumors to which Irving refers, the initial misperception leading to numerous other misunderstandings and miscommunications. These anxious imaginings contrast starkly with the positive imaginative prospects of the honey camp. Whereas seeing the bees elicits Irving's vision of countless herds of cattle populating the prairies, the alarm camp undermines any such positive visions. Gone is the sense of an advancing civilization, replaced by a paranoia that unsettles Irving and the rest of his company. In this sense, Irving's movement from the honey camp to the alarm camp might be seen as a movement from a domesticated nature that will be a future home to an untamed wilderness that remains uninhabitable. Irving can imagine the honey camp as a surrogate home, primarily because he can imagine human will imposing itself upon the honey camp and transforming it into a productive tract of land. The alarm camp, however, remains beyond such a figuration as home, for Irving cannot envision a similar transformation.

Whereas Irving primarily sees the natural world as a possible home inasmuch as he can imagine replacing wild tracts with cultivated pasturage, Kirkland, as I will discuss in the second half of this chapter, seeks to link the wilderness with the home, not transform it into one.

The alarm camp thus highlights Irving's and the rangers' growing discomfort not just in their travels but also in response to their natural surroundings. In part a land of milk and honey, the western prairies are also a land wherein the "civilized tourist" may be endangered at any time—even if that "danger" arises from the minds of the tourists themselves.¹⁷ As *A Tour* progresses, Irving records the successive failures of the company to maintain that harmonious relationship so celebrated in the honey camp. Their relationship to the prairies shifts from being one of inhabitation to one of intrusion. The alarm camp signals the company's increasing uneasiness about the expedition: the threats of Pawnee hunting bands, the hardships of traveling through the dense forest, the sacrifices of subsisting on hunted game and of running low on "luxury" foods such as bread. The "foul weather encampment," so named because of the deluge of rain that forces the company to remain encamped for several days, exposes not only the continuing toll the tour takes on the company but also the waste they leave in their wake.

As with the previous camp episodes I have discussed, in this later episode Irving focuses our attention on the relationship between the company of rangers and the camps that they construct. This time, however, rather than represent the land's potential to support an advancing civilization as he does with the honey camp, Irving vividly depicts

¹⁷ In "The Allegash and East Branch," the third piece in *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau calls attention to this fact. "Generally speaking," he writes, "a howling wilderness does not howl: it is the imagination of the traveler that does the howling" (300).

the devastation such an advance exacts upon the land. Lingering at the camp after the rangers march onward, Irving describes the scene at length:

I loitered in the rear of the troop as it forded the turbid brook and defiled through the labyrinths of the forest. I always felt disposed to linger until the last straggler disappeared among the trees and the distant note of the bugle died upon the ear, that I might behold the wilderness relapsing into silence and solitude. In the present instance, the deserted scene of our late bustling encampment had a forlorn and desolate appearance. The surrounding forest had been in many places trampled into a quagmire. (170)

Littered with the fragments of half-chopped trees and the bones and uncooked remains of various animals, the camp is a clear manifestation of the destructiveness that lies at the heart of the tour. The “reckless improvidence and wastefulness” that Irving recognizes here has actually marked the tour all along, from the felling of the twenty bee trees to the perpetual hunting of game along the trail. Such actions are usually seen as evidence of the industry necessary for domesticating the wilderness, for realizing the promises held out by those honey camp visions. But in surveying this scene, Irving highlights not the industry but the *excess* it represents. Whereas his earlier representations of the troop’s destructiveness betray no regrets, here Irving not only judges the recklessness of his particular touring party but also suggests the destructiveness behind *any* such similar foray into the west. Observing the waste his civilized tour has made of the forest, Irving begins to recognize his own complicity in that endeavor. The structure of *A Tour* underscores Irving’s recognition, for the text’s narrative progression traces how Irving’s naïve excitement at the beginning of the tour becomes tempered by realism and experience as his travels continue. His romantic dreams of adventure give way to their very real consequences, made inescapably evident by the recklessness and wastefulness

embodied by the rangers. Irving's fantasy of an advancing home on the prairies is replaced by the knowledge that such a vision was precisely a fantasy—that a portion of these prairies can hardly be framed as the domestic space he desires. That narrative trajectory culminates immediately after the foul weather camp with Irving's further alienation from the "hunters' life."

The foul weather encampment is followed by an episode that, in terms of *A Tour's* overall narrative, might be considered its climactic moment: that staple of western adventure narratives, a buffalo hunt. For Irving, however, this hunt results only in a disturbing recognition of his own wastefulness. While his observations about the foul weather encampment enable Irving to distance himself from the rangers' destruction, Irving's complicity in such disregard for nature is revealed—to himself and to the reader—in his account of the buffalo hunt. Significantly, Irving's disregard for the natural world is joined by his realization of the natural world's disregard for him, and the interplay of these two realizations highlights Irving's deepening recognition that, however he may try, the frontier and the life it represents will remain essentially alien to him.

Irving's buffalo hunt is framed by his response to the "grand prairie" on which it occurs. At first, this prairie inspires an "expansion of feeling" in Irving, one generated by "looking upon these boundless and fertile wastes" (171). This open land provides a relief from the enclosed forests that typify the Cross Timber and the alarm camp. But Irving's response to the prairie expanse is quickly reversed during the frantic chase of a buffalo. As the group disperses across the plain in pursuit of several different buffalo, Irving is

soon separated from the rest of the troop. Describing his situation in language that suggests his inconsequence in the face of the natural world, Irving writes:

I now found myself in the midst of a lonely waste, in which the prospect was bounded by undulating swells of land, naked and uniform, where, from the deficiency of landmarks and distinct features, an inexperienced man may become bewildered, and lose his way as readily as in the wastes of the ocean. . . .

To one unaccustomed to it, there is something inexpressibly lonely in the solitude of a prairie. . . . [H]ere we have an immense extent of landscape without a sign of human existence. We have the consciousness of being far, far beyond the bounds of human habitation; we feel as if moving in the midst of a desert world. (175–76)

What Irving describes here, it seems, is an “expansion of feeling” that has expanded too far, a sublime moment that profoundly undermines Irving’s sense of the prairies as a possible home. Insisting on the absence of humans from this scene, Irving dramatizes his own potential to be lost in this “immense” landscape. His shift from the first-person singular “I” to the plural “we” suggests Irving’s anxiety, displacing the loneliness he feels into a more generalized assertion; similarly, writing of “*an* inexperienced man” subtly deflects the recognition that *he* is that inexperienced man.¹⁸ Furthermore, where the grand prairie initially suggested (however paradoxically) a fertile waste, here Irving transforms it into a desertlike space. Barren and uniform, the prairie cannot be figured in Irving’s

¹⁸ A similar shift occurs in Thoreau’s “Ktaadn,” which I discuss in chapter 2. Describing the climactic moment on the shoulder ridge of Mount Katahdin (85–86), Thoreau abandons his typical first-person “I” in favor of the third-person “he,” accentuating the alienation from nature he feels then.

Irving’s use of “we” and his brief shift to the present tense could also be read as potentially including the reader, tactics that close the distance between the author and his audience so that they simultaneously experience what he experiences. Establishing such a rapport with his audience might have “improved [Irving’s] literary character at home,” as he indicated he wished to do, but his approach throughout *A Tour* seems to center less on how he relates his narrative than on what that narrative relates. That is, including his audience is not as vital a part of Irving’s project as it is for Kirkland, as I suggest at the close of this chapter.

imagination as a place for future human habitation. Unlike the honey camp, which suggested the coming domestication of nature and its transformation into a home, the grand prairie remains “far, far beyond” such human use.

Indeed, instead of representing the potential of an advancing civilization or an otherwise benign natural force, the grand prairie, characterized by its few animal inhabitants, becomes a foreboding terrain. Significantly, each of those animals stands not for its potential value for humans but for its subtle threat to Irving. Unlike his previous descriptions of animals, which often emphasize the bounty and health of the areas through which he has traveled, here Irving’s characterizations carry darker implications. The scene reinforces Irving’s sense of the prairie as an otherworldly terrain in which he may become “bewildered”: there are pelicans “stalking like spectres about a shallow pool”; the silence is broken by the “sinister croaking of a raven”; and a “scoundrel wolf” hovers around the solitary Irving, “howl[ing] and whin[ing] with tones that gave a dreariness to the surrounding solitude” (176). This shift suggests the ways in which Irving is refiguring his relationship to the prairies. No longer a land of milk and honey, the prairies are also no longer imagined as a site where humans and nature may coexist harmoniously.

Although Irving is only briefly immersed in this grim scene (he rejoins his hunting party after retracing his horse’s trail), these images of the grand prairie set a somber mood for what is usually an ecstatic, exciting episode of western literature. Irving’s high adventure, however, is transformed into high tragedy, as he realizes the excessiveness of his buffalo hunt. Having regrouped with his companions, Irving and

company set off after another herd of buffalo, intending to attempt one last chase before abandoning their hunt and returning to camp. This final attempt proves successful, and Irving immediately experiences what he calls “after-qualms of conscience” (178).¹⁹ Irving’s description of the fallen buffalo notably echoes his critique of the rangers’ effects on the forest at the foul weather encampment. “I am nothing of a sportsman,” Irving explains.

I had been prompted to this unwonted exploit by the magnitude of the game, and the excitement of an adventurous chase. Now that the excitement was over, I could not but look with commiseration upon the poor animal that lay struggling and bleeding at my feet. . . . It seemed as if I had inflicted pain in proportion to the bulk of my victim, and as if there were a hundred-fold greater waste of life than there would have been in the destruction of an animal of inferior size. (178)

Initially thrilled with the anticipation of the hunt, Irving is disturbed when confronted with its reality. While he could maintain a certain detachment from the destruction embodied by the foul weather encampment, here Irving must reconcile himself to what he calls “the wreck I had so wantonly produced” (179). Bryce Traister contends that *A Tour* “masculinizes sentiment by commemorating frontier violence and elevated sentiment as twin manifestations of manly accomplishment” (124), but Irving’s sentimental response to the dying buffalo calls into question his accomplishment and ultimately criticizes rather than commemorates such violence. Unable to deny his agency in killing the

¹⁹ Compare Thoreau’s qualms about moose hunting in “Chesuncook,” the second installment of *The Maine Woods*. After witnessing his guide and companion successfully shoot a moose, Thoreau writes that “the afternoon’s tragedy, and my share in it, as it affected the innocence, destroyed the pleasure of my adventure” (160). Thoreau goes on to say that the experience “suggested to me how base or coarse are the motives which commonly carry men into the wilderness” (161). As I will argue, Irving arrives at a version of this same conclusion.

buffalo, Irving is implicated in the very destructiveness and wastefulness he has previously condemned—and his representation of the buffalo's death reiterates that condemnation.²⁰

Culminating with Irving's buffalo hunt and his subsequent self-indictment for his actions, the narrative progression of *A Tour on the Prairies* reveals Irving's gradual acclimation to and then alienation from the "hunters' life" of the prairies. After Irving narrates this pivotal moment of the tour, his account of the journey becomes significantly compressed. He quickly details the search for a lost companion and, in a few remaining chapters, briefly describes the company's return to Fort Gibson. As William Bedford Clark notes, "In contrast to the leisurely pace at which Irving recounts the earlier events in the course of the expedition's itinerary, his account of the retreat toward Fort Gibson is telescoped in a manner that stresses its precipitous and beleaguered nature" (344–45). Clark suggests that this "retreat" is primarily a response to a "nature [that] has managed to defeat" the rangers, but such a reading does not sufficiently account for Irving's own recognition of humans' very real capacity to "defeat" nature. While *A Tour* does indeed recount the company's hardships on the prairie and their welcome return to human settlements, Irving also persistently records the wastefulness and destructiveness of his party as they make their way through this natural space. Heiner Bus argues that, for Irving, "the pioneer, the trapper, the naturalist, and the traveler never completely convert to the native experience. Rather, the land has to be converted" (172). While Bus is right

²⁰ Despite his "after-qualms of conscience," Irving still takes only the tongue of the buffalo as a "trophy" (179), leaving the rest of the corpse (hide, meat, and so on) to the scavenger wolves on the prairie.

in suggesting that *A Tour* is an account of Irving's failed conversion,²¹ it is also an account of his failure to convert the land to practical ends. Indeed, Irving and the rangers *destroy* the environment rather than convert it, and it is this realization that underlies Irving's response to killing his buffalo. The rangers may be characterized by their "beleaguered nature" at the end of the *Tour*, but they have also beleaguered nature throughout their expedition—and Irving's "telescoping" of his narrative occurs after he recognizes his complicity in that endeavor. To be sure, Irving's brevity at the end of *A Tour on the Prairies* captures the attitude of the company of rangers: tired, hungry, and increasingly discontent, the rangers no longer viewed the tour as a nice diversion but as a burdensome task. At the same time, though, the conclusion of Irving's tour can be read not just as a flight from nature but also as a flight from the "hunter's life" required to be at home on the prairies.

The final chapter of *A Tour on the Prairies* recounts one final scene of excess, a banquet dinner at a frontier farmhouse that marks Irving's return to human settlements and the civilization associated with them. "[A]nxious to arrive at some human habitation before night" (210) because of their diminishing supplies and exhausted bodies, the company eventually discovers the small farms of a few Creek Indians, who direct them some two miles onward to the homestead of a white settler. Irving describes the welcome scene by emphasizing how it was "teeming with abundance" (211). Although the house itself is just "a low tenement of logs, overshadowed by great forest trees," it is home to

²¹ Wayne R. Kime offers a slightly different interpretation of Irving's *Tour*. Seeing *A Tour on the Prairies* "as a carefully articulated narrative of a single initiatory action" (65), Kime argues that the book reveals Irving's movement from being a "naïve tourist" to possessing "an informed understanding of the West and its inhabitants" (55). Nevertheless, Kime concludes, "the Irving we see at the close of *A Tour* recognizes his separateness" from life on the prairies (64–65).

“legions” of farm animals and stockpiles of grain and corn. These outward signs of abundance are nothing compared to the feast Irving enjoys here, however. The settler’s wife—a “fat good-humored negress,” according to Irving (212)—provides the company with a meal that Irving describes ecstatically:

In a twinkling, she lugged from the fire a huge iron pot, that might have rivalled one of the famous flesh-pots of Egypt, or the witches’ caldron in Macbeth. Placing a brown earthen dish on the floor, she inclined the corpulent caldron on one side, and out leaped sundry great morsels of beef, with a regiment of turnips tumbling after them, and a rich cascade of broth overflowing the whole. (212)

Just as Irving’s excited descriptions of the honey camp signal his naïve expectations for the tour, so does this report reflect his relief at leaving camp life behind. Indeed, as his tour has revealed, such a life is less often one full of honey than one full of alarm. The banquet feast at the farmhouse becomes, then, a celebration of the bounty afforded by civilization, and *A Tour on the Prairies* concludes with Irving returning to his proper “home”: the already settled and developed lands of the United States.

Despite his clear relief at arriving at the settlements, Irving offers a final stock lament of the end of his tour, one that suggests that his sense of home *has* shifted slightly over the course of his narrative. Noting that he was “comfortably quartered” for the night at a trading post, Irving complains that the “confinement of a chamber was, in some respects, irksome. . . . I missed the glorious companionship of the stars” (214). In aligning the stars as his companions, Irving insists on a connection with nature and attempts to erase both the destructiveness at the heart of his tour and the alienation that so abruptly precipitates its end. Moreover, Irving subtly revises the language of his “Author’s Introduction,” in which he writes of the reception his friends gave him upon

his return home to the United States: “I thanked my stars that I had been born among such friends; I thanked my stars, that had conducted me back to dwell among them while I yet had the capacity to enjoy their fellowship” (7). Read against this earlier passage, Irving’s closing lament about the stars might be seen as expressing not only his vain attempt to claim a connection to nature but also his ongoing sense of alienation from home, even upon his return to the eastern settlements. For at the end of *A Tour*, Irving gazes around him and sees only a “complete darkness” (214)—a void in which he is left companionless, disconnected from the world around him.

Negotiating Nature and Narrating Community:
Caroline Kirkland’s *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?*

“There are but meager materials for anything which might be called a story,” Caroline Kirkland writes in the introduction to *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?* “I have never seen a cougar,” she continues, “nor been bitten by a rattlesnake” (33). Much like Irving, who opens *A Tour on the Prairies* by downplaying the appeal of his narrative even as he entices his readership with the promise of a masculine adventure into the Pawnee Indian hunting grounds, Kirkland opens her text by specifically disavowing any such romanticized high adventure even as she calls her experience “adventurous.” Instead of the thrills offered by such threatening encounters with wild animals (encounters that are very much the material of rugged individualism), Kirkland, writing in the narrative persona of Mrs. Mary Clavers,²² offers a detailed frontier realism that captures the

²² Mary Clavers, the narrator of *A New Home*, is largely regarded as a thin veil for Kirkland herself. The experiences Mrs. Clavers describes and the attitudes she expresses may thus also be attributed to Kirkland the author. Nevertheless, for clarity throughout my discussion, I maintain the distinction between the textual “Clavers” and the creator of that textual persona, “Kirkland.” Caroline Gebhard disputes the assumption that *A New Home* is autobiographical, claiming instead that Mrs. Clavers is the result of “comic

incremental development of her Michigan village of Montacute.²³ Her aim, she writes in her preface, is to provide “a sort of ‘Emigrant’s Guide’” (31) for her eastern readership. Kirkland’s investment in realism—Mrs. Clavers labels her account “a veracious history of actual occurrences, an unvarnished transcript of real characters” (33)—is thus tied to her didactic aims: to displace readerly preconceptions of the west with the “truths” of her own account and to prepare potential “future travellers” (35) for the hardships of living in “a home on the outskirts of civilization” (33). Kirkland captures this dual aim in her title *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?*, the interrogative serving as a challenge for her readers to follow her in creating this new home on the frontier.²⁴

Such an emigrant’s guide necessarily focuses on Mrs. Clavers’s response to the landscape itself, for the realities of place define the social conventions to which she must adapt. Even though she clings to remnants of her genteel, eastern sensibility in *A New Home*, Mrs. Clavers articulates a communitarian ethic that espouses an active role for women in shaping frontier settlement and that criticizes a male-oriented perspective that views the land in purely exploitative ways. At the core of each of these concerns, for Kirkland, is the individual’s relationship to the natural world, and in many ways her text critiques the materialist attitude toward nature that Irving’s text both describes and evidences. Although Irving certainly distances himself from the destruction and

self-invention” in Kirkland’s part. Gebhard seems to miss the point, though—just because Clavers is not identical to Kirkland does not mean the text is not autobiographical in nature.

²³ Just as Mary Clavers is Kirkland’s persona, so too is Montacute a representation of the actual village of Pinckney, the town that William Kirkland endeavored to develop in the late 1830s. For more on Kirkland’s biography and the circumstances surrounding the family’s move to Michigan, see Osborne and Walker.

²⁴ As I discuss later, part of Mrs. Clavers’s project is to engage her audience in her storytelling, to write her reader into the community of Montacute. While the question in Kirkland’s title might be read ironically as implying that no eastern readers will follow her narrator to Michigan, Mrs. Clavers’s intent seems to be the opposite. Although Mrs. Clavers certainly holds her new neighbors up for her readers’ amusement at times, the text does not work against its motives as an emigrants’ guide.

wastefulness of the rangers, he remains complicit in such a disregard for nature—a complicity underscored by his participation in the buffalo hunt. Whereas *A Tour on the Prairies* details Irving’s progressive alienation from the frontier way of life, Kirkland’s *A New Home* records her progressive familiarization with such a life. Furthermore, Kirkland offers a nationalistic vision that is ultimately at odds with that of Irving, whose honey camp episode suggests that the nation’s manifest destiny must be achieved through dominion over the land. By contrast, Kirkland’s emphasis on community, which she extends to her audience through Mrs. Clavers’s engaging narrative tactics, is grounded on a relationship to nature that is not based on destruction or domination but on inhabitation and preservation. And in elaborating such a relationship to the land, Kirkland’s text serves as an important predecessor of the works of Henry David Thoreau, Helen Hunt Jackson, and other authors who approach the American wilderness through an ecocentric rather than androcentric perspective. Moreover, in locating the land itself as a potential source of communal identification, Kirkland also anticipates Bayard Taylor’s belief that the American wilderness can serve to unite the nation.

Critics have long debated the extent of Kirkland’s communal spirit in *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?* While Nancy A. Walker claims that Kirkland leaves behind her “cultural pretensions and expectations to embrace the cooperative spirit of community building” (289), Janet Floyd notes that “the communities constructed and the spaces mapped by Kirkland’s and other emigrant women’s texts suggest a conception of neighborhood that is as often hostile as it is receptive to the community of the

backwoods” (129).²⁵ Kirkland’s text, as Brigitte Georgi-Findlay points out, is marked by Mrs. Clavers’s persistent concern with class identity and cultural refinement: “On the one hand, Kirkland’s narrator assumes a common bond of sisterhood with all women on the frontier; on the other, middle-class domesticity becomes a signal of class distinction and an instrument of social order” (34). Lori Merish has similarly noted Mrs. Clavers’s emphasis on refining the taste of her neighbors, claiming that an opposition between lower-class vulgarity and upper-class civility structures the text (97–98).

For Annette Kolodny, Kirkland’s concern with gender—specifically, the plight of women on the frontier and their potential influence on western settlement—outweighs the darker implications of her middle-class ideology. Though Kolodny notes Kirkland’s interest in cultural refinement (*Land Before Her* 146–47), she emphasizes the power such cultivation affords women rather than the power it enables the middle-class to exercise over the lower classes. *A New Home*, Kolodny contends, offers its female readership “an attractive, familiar, and, above all, *responsible* role on an unformed landscape that might yet bear their especial and *idealizing* imprint” (*Land Before Her* 148). In Kolodny’s reading of Kirkland’s garden imagery in *A New Home*, women, the cultivators of backwoods gardens, are to be the agents responsible for transforming the rough wilderness into a “western Eden” (147). Kolodny writes that “Though Kirkland repeatedly waxes eloquent in praise of the grapevines, flowers, ferns, and ‘wild straw-

²⁵ Like Walker, Caroline Gebhard reads *A New Home* as primarily illustrating community building: “Kirkland depicts the western backwoods as a place where the collective needs of survival have begun to break down ranks and distinctions” (171). Like Floyd, William S. Osborne emphasizes the “condescending” attitude that marks Kirkland’s narrator and, Osborne suggests, Kirkland herself (43). Sandra Zagarell likewise sees Kirkland’s text as demonstrating “that community will continue to take shape through the vital, often difficult, always absorbing process of cultural interchange and re-formation,” but contends that the community so established will reflect Clavers’s values alone (155).

berries' of the Michigan woodlands, it is not here that she has Mary Clavers locate her 'incipient Eden'" (146). Instead, Kolodny contends, the small, cultivated garden plot becomes the locus of Kirkland's ideal for frontier community.

While Kolodny's interpretation of *A New Home* is in many ways a compelling one, her emphasis on the garden as the central image of the text seems to diminish the importance Kirkland also places on the *uncultivated* landscape of Michigan. Ultimately, it is not the garden alone, but a balance between such refined plots and their wilderness environs, as well as a balance between eastern refinement and local customs, that Kirkland wishes to celebrate. Such balances are tenuous ones, indeed. And as the narrative trajectory of Kirkland's text suggests, it requires a challenging negotiation of both the natural and the social landscape of backwoods Michigan.

Like Irving in *A Tour on the Prairies*, in *A New Home* Kirkland's Mrs. Clavers focuses our attention on her gradual adjustment to her new environment. That adjustment, however, is partly precipitated by texts like Irving's. From the opening chapter, Kirkland constructs her text as a corrective to romantic visions of the western landscape such as those offered in Irving's *A Tour* or in Charles Fenno Hoffman's *A Winter in the West* (1835). Such texts, Kirkland contends, are "touched by the glowing pencil of fancy" and provide "incorrect notions of a real journey through Michigan" (36).²⁶ For Kirkland, that

²⁶ Critics often cite the following passage from Hoffman's *A Winter in the West* as evidence of his idealized view of the Michigan: "What a country this is. Into land like this, which is comparatively undervalued by those seeking to settle on the prairie, a man can run his plough without felling a tree; and, planting a hundred acres, where he would clear but ten in the unsettled districts of New-York, raise his twenty-five bushels of wheat to an acre in the very first season" (183). Kirkland's assessment of Hoffman's account, it seems, is less generous than it could be. Though Hoffman is certainly given to romanticizing the potential of the Michigan territory, he likewise notes its less than ideal features. Indeed, a passage immediately before the "fanciful" one speaks to the "realities" of Michigan. Writing of the trouble he had following a blazed trail, Hoffman admits, "It took me three hours to gain six miles in this way, my horse slipping and

“fancy” is eminently the domain of men, and in chapters 8 and 9 of her text, Mrs. Clavers lampoons the male frontier adventure typified by Irving and Hoffman. While stuck at an overcrowded inn in Detroit, Mr. Clavers accepts an invitation to join some acquaintances on “a tour with a view to the purchase of one or two cities” (57), the details of which he relates to his wife upon his return. Ostensibly driven by economic motives, this tour is also meant to be recreational: “It was intended to ‘camp out’ as often as might be desirable, to think nothing of fasting for a day or so, and to defy the ague and all its works” (57). Kirkland thus mocks the bravado with which the men approach their excursion, and its dismal failure only amplifies her critique of their attitude. After becoming lost after nightfall on the first day of the tour, the men abandon their ideas of camping, which they had “so manfully planned in the morning” (59); instead, they wander for hours in search of shelter, eventually happening upon a tiny log cabin inhabited by a family. The hardships of the first day only foretell the failure of the entire trip. The men are “absent just four days,” and they return “tired and dirty, cross and hungry,” offering “no word of adventures, no boasting of achievements” (57–58). The experience silences the men and exposes the flaws in their “fanciful” construction of the Michigan wilderness, and their humble return to the inn approximates Irving’s anxious return to the settlements.

While Kirkland obviously makes fun of the ineptitude of this “manful” expedition, she also subtly criticizes the men’s attitude toward the land through which they pass. Although the party is initially disheartened to find one of the sites of their

floundering at almost every step” (183). Similarly, as I have pointed out, Irving’s *A Tour on the Prairies* offers more than a naively romantic view of the West. Nevertheless, Kirkland’s criticism is directed toward a general tendency in the literature and not toward occasional passages.

intended cities to be little more than a marshy plot unfit for building (60), they reassess the land on their return to Detroit. This reassessment exposes the flaws in the party's romanticized belief in their ability to convert any tract of wild land to fit their vision of western settlement. Mrs. Clavers tells us:

The old gentlemen were much pleased with certain statistical accounts furnished them by the trader, whom they decided on the whole to be a very sensible fellow: and when they reached once more the chosen spot, they saw at a glance how easily the marshes could be drained, the channel of the Shark deepened, and the whole converted into one broad area on which to found a second New-York. (62)

The quickness with which the men revise their previous impressions of the land (“at a glance”) points to the foolhardiness of their thinking. Their judgment, as we have seen from the inflated notions of their tour, is nothing if not suspect, and the scale of this fantasy—based as it is on the perceived ease of such a wholesale transformation of the land into “New New-York”—is clearly an extension of that ridiculous misperception. Indeed, as Mrs. Clavers reveals at the end of chapter 9, one year after its creation, the splendid new settlement is occupied only by the few people the landowners have paid to emigrate there.

The inflated visions of New New-York contrast nicely with those of Montacute, the village that Mr. Clavers hopes to found on land he has recently purchased. The scale of Montacute makes it a much more reasonable enterprise, as Mrs. Clavers's explains:

“The madness of the people” in those days of golden dreams took more commonly the form of city-building; but there were a few who contented themselves with planning villages, on the banks of streams which certainly never could be expected to bear navies, but which might yet be turned to account in the more homely way of grinding or sawing. . . . It is of one of these humble attempts that it is my lot to speak. (34)

Elizabeth Barnes suggests that this passage is Clavers's ironic confession that her husband similarly partakes of such madness (63), but Barnes fundamentally misreads the language here. Montacute obviously evidences a humility absent in the madness that marks New New-York. It will be a "village" and not a "city," and its commerce will be turned toward such "homely" work as grinding and sawing.

Through her account of the men's four-day tour and the contrast between their grandiose plans for New New-York and the homely ones of Montacute, Kirkland mocks both a masculine conception of backwoods adventure and an anthropocentric view that seeks to carve a settled space out of an unsettled landscape. Mrs. Clavers's emigrants' guide seeks to remedy, then, false impressions not only of journeying through the Michigan landscape but also of residing within that space. In this way, we can see Kirkland's *A New Home* as a response to the central concerns of Washington Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies*. Mrs. Clavers is able to adapt to the landscape to a degree that Irving represents himself failing to reach.

As early as the first chapter, Kirkland dramatizes Mrs. Clavers's awakening to the realities posed by such a journey through Michigan, as she moves from a focus on the abundance of wildflowers to a recognition of the less desirable features of the territory's landscape. After explaining that her husband has purchased land in Michigan with the hopes of founding a village, Mrs. Clavers describes her initial response to the area:

When I made my first visit to these remote and lonely regions, the scattered woods through which we rode for many miles were gay in their first gosling-green suit of half-opened leaves, and the forest odors which exhaled with the dews of morning and evening, were beyond measure delicious to one 'long in populous cities pent.' I desired much to be a little sentimental at the time, and feel tempted to indulge to some small extent even here—but I forbear. (35)

Despite claiming to forbear sentimental response, in the next two paragraphs Mrs. Clavers seems to offer just that. She recounts picking “upwards of twenty varieties of wild-flowers” before asserting that these Michigan wildflowers “deserve a poet of their own” (35). This aside on the wildflowers is, in part, an exercise in literary nationalism. Mrs. Clavers cites the likely responses of Percy Bysshe Shelley, Charles Lamb, and Edward Bulwer(-Lytton), only to conclude emphatically that “We must have a poet of our own” (35).²⁷ The landscape of the American frontier demands an American literary response. However, Kirkland’s point here about nationalism is overshadowed by her argument about the appropriate way of conceiving of nature—for even as Mrs. Clavers asserts the need for an American poet to sing of the frontier’s beauty, she ultimately undermines such a romantic response. Embedded in her description of the writings of Shelley, Lamb, and Bulwer is an implicit critique based less on their national identity than on their attitude toward the natural world. Like the men on that four-day tour, these authors allow their romantic imaginations to overlay the realities of the area. They sing “so quaintly,” offer “many a fanciful comparison,” and write “charming volumes” (35). Read in the context of her critique of Hoffman’s “fancy” later in the chapter and her mockery of the four-day tour later in the book, Mrs. Clavers’s language here seems less a positive appraisal of these British authors’ successes in writing about the land than a subtle criticism of their perspective.

²⁷ Kirkland anticipates Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “The Poet” (1845) and his similar call for an American poet to “chaunt our own times and social circumstance” and to celebrate “the value of our incomparable materials” (322). Emerson writes that “. . . the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung. Yet America is a poem in our eyes; its ample geography dazzles the imagination, and it will not wait long for metres” (322).

It is significant, then, that Mrs. Clavers ends her sentimental interlude about the beauty of Michigan wildflowers by turning to the details of her difficult carriage ride from Detroit to the environs of Montacute. Her romantic associations are replaced by the realism of her situation, her complacency replaced by fear. One of the characteristics of backwoods travel through Michigan, Mrs. Clavers explains, is the frequent mudholes that disrupt the roads and “[break] the thread of one’s reverie” (35)—just about as unromantic a feature of the landscape as one can imagine. The previously pleasant, delicious woods along the carriage road give way to the “formidable gulf” of such a mudhole. Their path blocked on all sides, the Claverses²⁸ must rely on the assistance of a French hunter who happens to notice their predicament. Dressed in “an immense bear-skin cap and a suit of deer’s hide” and “as wild and rough a specimen of humanity as one would wish to encounter in a strange and lonely road” (36–37), the hunter frightens the stranded Mrs. Clavers when he emerges from the forest. Her eastern preconceptions have not prepared her for the “generous politeness” of the hunter, who spans the mudhole with a rail and assists Mrs. Clavers across before directing her husband and their carriage through the ditch. The hunter’s relation to the land stands in stark contrast to the romanticized pictures of the British authors and, indeed, of Mrs. Clavers’s earlier reverie. More significantly, his actions foretell the kind of communal concern that marks life in frontier Michigan: the differences between the French hunter and the Claverses become insignificant in light of the assistance he provides to them.

²⁸ At this point in the account, Mrs. Clavers refers to Mr. Clavers simply as her “companion,” giving no indication of her real relationship with that companion.

While Nathaniel Lewis suggests that this mudhole scene expresses Kirkland's subtle endorsement of "the denuding of forest for the sake of good roads" (67), Mrs. Clavers does not seem to lament the fact that mudholes are such a ubiquitous feature of the Michigan landscape.²⁹ Indeed, Kirkland's opening chapter culminates with yet another mudhole encounter—one in which Mrs. Clavers almost revels in the experience as a threshold between her identities as easterner and westerner. The passage captures Kirkland's shifting understanding of the Michigan landscape, expressed through her self-mocking humor, and it depicts her literal and figurative immersion into her new wilderness surroundings. Writing of their third day out from Detroit, Kirkland explains, "We were crossing a broad expanse of what seemed at a little distance a smooth shaven lawn of the most brilliant green, but which proved on trial little better than a quaking bog" (38). Initially reading the landscape in familiar terms, Kirkland discovers that the expanse is nothing like the "lawn" she figures it to be. Immediately after Kirkland expresses to her husband her hope to see their "hotel" very soon, the horse, carriage, and its two passengers unexpectedly plunge into the mire:

Down came the horse—and this was not all—down came the driver; and I could not do less than follow, though at a little distance—our good steed kicking and floundering—covering us with hieroglyphics, which would be readily decyphered by any Wolverine we should meet, though perchance strange to the eyes of our friends at home. . . . We journeyed on cheerily, watching the splendid changes in the west, but keeping a bright look-out for bog-holes. (38)

Falling into the mudhole begins to transform Mrs. Clavers into a westerner. She now bears the traces of her western experience, a language written on her appearance only to

²⁹ Later in the text Mrs. Clavers celebrates having at her disposal a bridle path with which she "had no fears of a road" interfering (191), an indication that Kirkland is not as concerned with good roads as Lewis suggests.

be understood by fellow “Wolverines.”³⁰ Significantly, Mrs. Clavers’s attitude is also transformed for the better by this “mishap.” Whereas she admits in an aside to the reader that she “was getting cross and tired” after the three-day journey, Mrs. Clavers notes that after falling into the bog she and her husband “journeyed on cheerily.” This transformation accompanies Mrs. Clavers’s refocused attention: whereas she was previously focused on the accommodations of the hotel, she now attends to the natural beauty of the terrain itself (“the splendid changes in the west”). The bog-hole incident further underlines the distinctions to be made between Mrs. Clavers’s relationship to her environment and the one expressed by the men on the four-day tour, and, by extension, the distinctions to be made between Kirkland and Irving. Unlike the men, who imagine draining the marshes in order to realize their dreams of a New New-York, Mrs. Clavers is content to let mudholes remain mudholes. Although she is certainly not against the development of the infrastructure necessary for settling Michigan, she remains critical of perspectives that treat the natural world as purely a practical resource to be exploited. Indeed, she suggests that such perspectives are fanciful and unrealistic.

As my discussion of Kirkland’s opening chapter illustrates, Mrs. Clavers is keenly aware of the need to adjust to the new demands of the Michigan landscape. She becomes equally cognizant of the need to adapt to the social habits and mores of her new community. A number of critics have pointed out that *A New Home* details Mrs.

³⁰ This new language might be linked to Mrs. Clavers’s earlier call for an American poet to celebrate the beauty of American nature. She has, in effect, inscribed on herself the poetry of place by falling into the mudhole.

Clavers's gradual acculturation into Montacute life.³¹ The initial stages of that acculturation revolve around setting up her home. After rooming with a local family for several days while awaiting the vacancy of her temporary home, Mrs. Clavers enlists her new neighbors to assist her in moving. The episode reveals the drastic difference between Mrs. Clavers's old home and her new one. First, the Claverses have been overzealous in their packing: as Mrs. Clavers admits, "one half of our moveables at least must remain in the open air" (75). While the log home is too small to contain all of the Claverses' property, their miscalculation is not one of quantity alone. Instead, without thinking about it, the Claverses have attempted to transport their eastern home to the Michigan backwoods, and the folly of such a transplant becomes evident as Mrs. Clavers unpacks in front of her neighbors:

Mr. Jennings, with the aid of his sons, undertook the release of the pent up myriads of articles which crammed the boxes, many of which though ranked when they were put in as absolutely essential, seemed ridiculously superfluous when they came out. The many observations made by the spectators as each new wonder made its appearance, though at first rather amusing, became after a while quite vexatious; for the truth began to dawn upon me that the common sense was all on their side. (76)

The "superfluities" that Mrs. Clavers has moved to Montacute answer little practical purpose, especially in "this hut in the wilderness" (75). However much Mrs. Clavers wishes to re-create her eastern interior, she abandons that idea and accommodates her living arrangements to her new situation. Her set of delicate japanned tables are of no use except as kindling for a fire, and an ornate cupboard that will not fit in her new kitchen must be placed outdoors. Her idea of comfort, Mrs. Clavers admits, becomes "narrowed

³¹ Kolodny, for instance, argues that it takes Kirkland a full third of her text to dispense with "all the relevant literary ghosts" and to "begin the advertised subject of her narrative," the "seasoning process" by which she makes the transition to Montacute life (*Land Before Her* 137).

down to a well-swept room with a bed in one corner, and cooking-apparatus in another” (78). At the same time as Mrs. Clavers scales back her living arrangements, she must hire a series of women to serve as domestic help. On the one hand, such help might suggest that Mrs. Clavers clings to her previous status; on the other, however, these women work to initiate Mrs. Clavers into the Montacute community. Indeed, hiring domestic help does not distinguish Mrs. Clavers from her neighbors so much as it instructs her to live more like them.³²

Eventually, Mrs. Clavers comes to self-identify as a member of the Montacute community. Acting out the didactic impulse behind her text, she becomes a “mentor” for Mrs. Rivers, a young, well-heeled woman who has moved to the area from the east with her husband. Similarly, Mrs. Clavers assumes the right “to speak for the natives” of Montacute (101), advising Mrs. Rivers on the proper way of acting among her new neighbors. Despite seeming to assume *too much* of a right in speaking for the community at large, and, indeed, expressing a patronizing attitude toward that community by identifying them as her “rustic neighbors,”³³ Mrs. Clavers nevertheless sees herself as a westerner. Writing about some emigrants—notably, those who *refuse* to take on the way of life of their new surroundings—Mrs. Clavers claims that they “abuse Michigan . . . by

³² Mrs. Clavers opens chapter 14 by describing the turnover in her domestic help: “When Angeline left me, which she did after a few days, I was obliged to employ Mrs. Jennings to ‘chore round,’ to borrow her own expression; and as Mr. Clavers was absent much of the time, I had the full enjoyment of her delectable society with that of her husband and two children, who often came to meals very sociably, and made themselves at home with small urgency on my part” (85). Mrs. Clavers is, of course, partly ironic in describing her situation this way. We are meant to question just how “delectable” the society of the Jennings family is, but at the same time we must recognize that, however much their presence is a slight irritant, the Jenningses provide Mrs. Clavers with a sense of connection to the community.

³³ At one point, Mrs. Clavers also suggests that she could “amaze” her readers with further descriptions of “these peculiar habits of my neighbors.” She has merely provided “a shadow of what might be told” (85). It is worth noting that the publication of *A New Home* did not exactly ingratiate Kirkland to her neighbors in Pinckney, a number of whom were not in the least flattered by the author’s representation of the town. See, for instance, Osborne 34 and Walker 287.

telling very hard stories about *us nor'westers*" (86; emphasis mine). Mrs. Clavers recognizes that a person's very survival in the Michigan backwoods depends upon a willingness to modify continually one's behavior, such as by accepting the liberal way in which her neighbors borrow her possessions.

As much as Mrs. Clavers accommodates herself to her new surroundings and comes to identify as one of "us nor'westers," she also clearly distinguishes herself from her neighbors. As I have mentioned, Mrs. Clavers implies that her neighbors are "rustic" while she is not. On the one hand, the impractical objects that Mrs. Clavers has brought with her into the wilderness signal her fundamental misunderstanding of the reality of living at Montacute; on the other hand, those objects signify a cultural refinement that she possesses over her neighbors, one that she sheds to some extent but the traces of which inevitably remain. As Mrs. Clavers admits in a chapter detailing her family's suffering from the ague, her neighbors apparently recognize those traces. They "showed but little sympathy" for the sick family, Mrs. Clavers explains. "They had imbibed the idea that we held ourselves above them" (95). For the most part, however, Mrs. Clavers is careful to conceal any evidence of social superiority. The trick to living in the backwoods of Michigan, Kirkland suggests, is the subtle negotiation between eastern manners and local customs—what Mrs. Clavers calls the "more rational arrangements of the older world" and the "homely habits of those around you." She describes her own balancing of the two perspectives:

It did not require a very long residence in Michigan, to convince me that it is unwise to attempt to stem directly the current of society, even in the wilderness,

but I have since learned many ways of *wearing round*, which give me the opportunity of living very much after my own fashion, without offending, very seriously, anybody's prejudices. (86)

While this passage is explicitly about Mrs. Clavers's attempt at preserving intact a portion of her eastern identity, it also suggests the communal effects of such a project.

Mrs. Clavers recognizes the uselessness of *directly* changing her neighbors; she articulates instead the need for an *indirect* influence that can re-form the democratic habits of the wilderness into middle-class propriety. Through the "silent influence of example," Mrs. Clavers suggests, the general character of the Michigan backwoods may be refined and elevated so that "all that is kind, forbearing, true, lovely, and of good report" (87) may thrive there. Living after her own fashion will enable Mrs. Clavers to fashion her neighbors' lives after her own.

Crucially, however, Mrs. Clavers does not seek to impose her eastern beliefs on her western locale, nor does she remove herself and her family from interactions with the larger community. While Mrs. Clavers certainly seeks to refine some of her neighbors' manners, she also has significantly refined her own; to be sure, Mrs. Clavers still privileges portions of her middle-class identity, but she comes to realize that she must constantly negotiate between her earlier attitudes and her new beliefs. Indeed, her advice to Mrs. Rivers is meant to demonstrate precisely such a negotiation that will enable

proper intercourse between neighbors. Through her encounter with the family of Mr. B— she provides a cautionary tale for those potential emigrants who hope to transplant their way of life without modifying it to suit their new place.³⁴

At first glance, the home of Mr. B— and his family seems like an ideal one. Mrs. Clavers records her impressions of the house as she and her husband ride up to it:

It was embowered in oaks of the largest size; and one glance told us that the hand of refined taste had been there. The under-brush had been entirely cleared away, and the broad expanse before the house looked like a smooth-shaven lawn, deep-shadowed by the fine trees I have mentioned. Gleams of sunset fell on beds of flowers of every hue; curtains of French muslin shaded the narrow windows, and on a rustic seat near the door lay a Spanish guitar, with its broad scarf of blue silk. (109–110)

The log home's idyllic, natural setting is complemented by its cosmopolitan appearance.

The fine taste in decoration and music bespeaks the cultured nature of the inhabitants.

Like the previous "smooth-shaven lawn" that was revealed to be a "quaking bog," so too does this lawn hide a reality that lurks just beneath its surface. But whereas that previous lawn gave way to an immediate contact with the natural world, here it stands as a sign of the B—s's separation from nature. Indeed, while on the one hand the house's situation suggests being cradled by nature, on the other it implies a strict distinction between the home and its surroundings. As we are told, the "under-brush had been entirely cleared away" from the house. Moreover, the cosmopolitanism evidenced by the Spanish and French furnishings suggests that the B—s cling to a European identity at odds with their American location. Furthermore, as Mrs. Clavers discovers, despite their appearance of luxury the B—s suffer in poverty, largely because Mr. B— refuses to engage in the work

³⁴ In chapter 4, I discuss the idea of transplanting home in relation to Helen Hunt Jackson's *Bits of Travel at Home*. Her notion of transplantation relies on precisely the kind of adaptation to locality that Kirkland advises in *A New Home*.

necessary to provide for his family. Mr. B—, Mrs. Clavers explains, “had by no means changed with his place of residence” (113); their land could provide ample support for the family, but Mr. B— will not stoop to become a farmer and has no money to pay others to cultivate the land for him.

In contrast to the pristine exterior of the house, the interior is “filthy” and “dirty” (110). The B—s’s house is a reflection of the degraded status of its “master,” who has chosen a life of “reckless self-indulgence” (110) and “determined indolence” (111) instead of one of “plodding industry” (114). In many ways, Mr. B— refuses to live by the American ideal of the self-made man, opting for an aristocratic attitude of leisure instead of applying hard work to support his family. Yet another problem with the B—s, Mrs. Clavers insists, is their tenacious clinging to their sense of superiority, which is partly evidenced by the objects that decorate their home. Whereas Mrs. Clavers details her own storing of the “superfluities” she has moved to Montacute, the B—s have theirs on constant display. Juxtaposing finery and filth, the B—s’s interior exposes how their manner of living is absolutely incompatible with their geographic location.

To some extent, Mrs. B— is a sympathetic figure in contrast to her husband. Unlike Mr. B—, who is content to lounge around his home in gentlemanly fashion, Mrs. B— strives to maintain a level of subsistence for her family. Nevertheless, she too views her neighbors as “far beneath her” and, in addition to her practical efforts to provide her children with food, makes “a great effort to keep up a certain appearance” (113). While the B—s undoubtedly possess refined taste, they also have failed to refine their own tastes in accordance with the new surroundings.

If Mrs. Clavers' includes the story of Mr. B— and his family as a caution against maintaining misplaced ideals of cultural refinement in the wilderness, the narrative of Cora and Everard Hastings seems to stand as an ideal vision for such a "forest home." Importantly, the chapter that precedes the encounter with the Hastingses extols the natural world and emphasizes its particular appeal for women. Throughout *A New Home*, Mrs. Clavers calls attention to the demands that living in Michigan places on women in particular, noting that the privations of the frontier affect them more than they do men. "Women are the grumblers in Michigan," Mrs. Clavers writes, "and they have some apology. They have made sacrifices for which they were not at all prepared, and which detract largely from their every day stores of comfort" (188).

Although the female frontier experience is marked by sacrifice, it also offers a particular reward in "the compensating power of the wilderness" (189). Echoing fairly conventional rhetoric about the "unbounded and unceremonious liberty" available along the western frontier, Mrs. Clavers significantly re-casts that sentiment by applying it to women. Typically, the freedom to be found in the wilderness is figured as a male escape from domesticity—perhaps most notably represented by Huck Finn's desire to light out for the Territories before Aunt Sally has the chance to "sivilize" him, but also recognizable in Natty Bumppo's insistence on a frontier life separate from the trappings of civilization. In this chapter of *A New Home*, however, Kirkland suggests that the natural world plays a crucial role in assisting women both to preserve the domestic space and to escape it. After detailing the numerous "deficiencies" women face on the frontier (188), Mrs. Clavers is careful to qualify her assertions:

After allowing due weight to the many disadvantages and trials of a new-country life, it would scarce be fair to pass without notice the compensating power of a feeling, inherent as I believe, in our universal nature, which rejoices in that freedom from the restraints of pride and ceremony which is found only in a new country. . . .

. . . I ascribe much of the placid contentment, which seems the heritage of rural life, to the constant familiarity with woods and waters— . . . (189–90)

In part, the compensating power of the wilderness acts as a restorative: women can turn to nature in order to be re-energized to perform their domestic tasks, “those important nothings on which so much depends” (188). Nature thus serves to underwrite the domestic space, operating as a relief from responsibilities that ultimately reaffirms and reasserts those responsibilities.

But what Mrs. Clavers describes here is not just a respite from the demands of frontier housekeeping but a relief from “old country” conceptions of class and manners to be found in nature. One “compensating power of the wilderness,” Kirkland suggests, is the new role it offers women in constructing the world of frontier settlement. As Mrs. Clavers explains, “As women feel sensibly the deficiencies of the ‘salvage’ state, so they are the first to attempt the refining process” (188). As we have seen, that refinement is not merely a transplantation of the pride and ceremony of the east, but rather the careful negotiation enacted by Mrs. Clavers herself and, as we will see, by Cora and Everard Hastings. It is only through a “constant familiarity with woods and waters” that such a balance may be realized.

As Annette Kolodny notes, “It is in the closing story of Cora and Everard Hastings . . . that Kirkland etched her fullest portrait of a model frontier couple” (*Land Before Her* 141). Building on her reading of Kirkland’s assertion that it is “well worth

while to make a garden in Michigan” (*A New Home* 118) and on Kirkland’s description of the state as an “incipient Eden,” Kolodny contends that Kirkland defines Everard and Cora as “the appropriate Adam and Eve for her frontier paradise” (*Land Before Her* 141). Their story is one of a “fortunate fall” that strips them of their romantic illusions and that enables them to create a new home in the west (141).³⁵ While Kolodny locates in the story of Cora and Everard Hastings Kirkland’s creation of an Edenic garden, I would suggest that the Hastingses’s narrative celebrates equally the uncultivated wilderness. To focus on the garden alone is to miss the forest that surrounds it.

As I have already noted, Kolodny acknowledges Kirkland’s concern with the wilderness but largely divests it of its significance. But from the beginning of Mrs. Clavers’s encounter with Cora and Everard, Kirkland makes it clear that the uncultivated natural world provides the necessary context for this story. In the chapter following her “waxing eloquent” about the power of the wilderness, Mrs. Clavers begins narrating the episode that introduces her and her husband to the Hastingses:

A bridle-path through the deep woods which lie south-west of our village, had long been a favorite walk on those few days of our Boreal summer, when shade had seemed an essential element of comfort. The forest itself is so entirely cumbered with shrubs and tangled vines, that to effect even a narrow path through it, had been a work of no little time and labor; and as no money was likely to flow in upon us from that direction, I had no fears of a road, but considered the whole as a magnificent *pleasaunce* for the special delight of those who can discern glory and splendor in grass and wild-flowers. (191)

³⁵ We learn the following about Cora and Everard: they have defied their parents in New York by taking the “mad step” of leaving “clandestinely” for the western New York (200). They were young romantics “who had set out to live on other people’s thoughts” (203), but after setting up a homestead in New York and having a child, they become violently ill. Cora’s mother and father appear, the families are reconciled, and it is revealed that for economic reasons the young couple must move to family land in Michigan and begin cultivating it.

Mrs. Clavers emphasizes the undeveloped nature of the woods through which she and her husband pass. Although a narrow path has been cut through it, the forest remains “deep” and “tangled”—and its roadless status suggests not impending cultivation but natural preservation. The “*pleasaunce*” Mrs. Clavers derives from this tract is not in imagining its potential but in enjoying the reality of its current untamed state.

Mrs. Clavers figures the bridle path as an area largely beyond human encroachment. While the woods lie just to the southwest of the village, Mrs. Clavers seems to note that fact not to emphasize their proximity and familiarity but to insist on their distance from Montacute. “We followed the bridle-path for miles,” she says, “finding scarcely a trace of human life” (192). After observing numerous wild animals, the Claverses eventually encounter a solitary sportsman. Mrs. Clavers characterizes even this one “trace of human life” as an outgrowth of the forest itself. “He seemed like the tutelary deity” of the woods, she claims, noting that he “had a curious mixture of good-breeding with that sort of rustic freedom and abruptness, which is the natural growth of the wilderness” (193). Unlike the overrefined and detached Mr. B—, who remains fundamentally alienated from his surroundings, Everard Hastings has adapted himself to his new environment. Likewise, Cora displays “a grace which was evidently imported from some civilized region” (193) and yet dresses only in “a rational, home-like, calico” (194). Similarly, whereas Mr. B— remains detached from the Claverses during their visit, Everard immediately engages them in conversation, and, Mrs. Clavers remarks, “it was not long before he offered to show us a charming variety in the landscape” (193).

That Everard's initial contact with the Claverses centers on his knowledge of the landscape is not insignificant, for it reveals the central role of uncultivated nature in defining the Hastingses's relationship with the Michigan backwoods. That role is embodied by the construction and placement of the couple's cottage. A "long, low, irregularly-shaped house, built of rich brown tamarack logs, nearly new," the Hastingses's cottage commands a prospect that looks over a basin on the one hand and into "the deep woods" on the other (193). Again, Mrs. Clavers asserts an implicit comparison between the homes of the Hastingses and the B—s. Whereas the B—s have cleared nature *away* from their home, Cora and Everard have situated theirs *within* the wilderness. The interiors of the houses similarly contrast: instead of the B—s's French muslin curtains, the Hastingses have a window "draperied with wild vines" (194). Though we learn later that Cora and Everard possess a "large fertile tract" that is "managed by a practical farmer and his family" (212), the salient feature of their home is not the farmland they have cultivated but the *wildness* of the land in which they live. Kolodny is right in asserting that Cora and Everard are Kirkland's fullest picture of a model frontier couple, but what they model is not simply the advancement of cultivated taste into the wilderness but the subtle negotiation between refinement and rusticity and between home and nature.

Ultimately, it is that negotiation between spaces and behaviors that Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* seeks to affirm. As the experiences of Mrs. Clavers demonstrate, and as her sketches of her fellow inhabitants reinforce, the point of her "emigrant's guide" is not that the backwoods of Michigan must be made over to

reflect eastern values. *A New Home* is not a narrative of transplanted settlement. Rather, Kirkland's text constructs this "new home" through a "constant familiarity with woods and waters," a familiarity that requires constant adaptation to one's environment and rigorous questioning of the validity of one's values.

The familiarity Mrs. Clavers develops with her natural surroundings and with the community of Montacute is accompanied by another kind of familiarity: an intimacy with her narratee that encourages the reader to occupy the same communal space as the villagers of Montacute.³⁶ Indeed, Kirkland's text is as much an enacting of the "seasoning process" as it is a description of it, as Mrs. Clavers adopts the role of mentor not only toward new settlers like Mrs. Rivers but also toward her readership. Such a role is not surprising, of course, given Mrs. Clavers's stated intention of writing an emigrants' guide. She is clearly using her own experiences as a template for other potential westward emigrants, and thus the audience becomes an important extension of Mrs. Clavers's negotiations in *A New Home—Who'll Follow?*

Curiously, however, a crucial part of that mentorship revolves around what Mrs. Clavers *withholds* from her audience. At key moments in her text, Mrs. Clavers calls attention to her refusal to narrate certain details of life in the backwoods. In chapter 14 of *A New Home*, for instance, she advises her readers to consider her "sketch of these peculiar habits of my neighbors" as "a mere beginning, a shadow of what might be told." While she admits she could "amaze" her readership with those peculiarities, she

³⁶ As I argue below, the narratee of *A New Home*—the intratextual audience to whom Mrs. Clavers addresses her narration—is relatively the same as its reader—the extratextual audience that reads Kirkland's text. I use "narratee" here because it is the more precise term, but I use it interchangeably with "audience" and "readership" throughout the remainder of this section because Kirkland invites a her readers to identify with the narratee.

“forbear[s]” doing so (85)—much as she previously forebears to indulge in sentimental response to the wildflowers she sees on her stage ride to Montacute. On one hand, this passage functions to make backwoods Michigan and its inhabitants a peculiar spectacle, one set forth for the amusement of a more cultivated audience. On the other hand, though, the “forbearance” Mrs. Clavers exhibits here can also be read as a *refusal* to create such a spectacle out of her new community. The passage thus suggests the precarious position of Mrs. Clavers as a narrator. Through her subtle negotiation of her relationships with both her audience and her new neighbors, Mrs. Clavers uses her status as an insider in two separate communities in order to manufacture a third: one acutely aware of the dangers of romanticizing western life in Michigan but one equally aware of the follies of misplaced eastern attitudes. Indeed, it is often through what Mrs. Clavers *might* tell her readers—not what she *does* tell them—that she encourages them to join her in this new home.

From the outset of *A New Home*, Mrs. Clavers attempts to establish a rapport with her intended audience. As I noted earlier, that audience is largely figured as a literate, middle-class, eastern readership³⁷—the society that the Claverses (and the Kirklands) left behind for life in Michigan. In chronicling her experiences and offering them to the public “in a form not very different from that in which they were originally recorded for our private delectation” (33), Mrs. Clavers suggests that she is opening up to her readers as she would to intimate acquaintances. In making her private experience available for public consumption, she makes that public audience a private one.

³⁷ Mrs. Clavers likens her book to Mary Russell Mitford’s *Our Village* (1824–1832). Janet Floyd points out that such an association suggests that the village sketch “can be written in a high cultural form and with some seriousness” (137). See Floyd 136–38 for more on Kirkland’s debt to Mitford and the critical response to it.

Indeed, such a familiar treatment of her audience is a hallmark of Mrs. Clavers's narration. In several of the moments of *A New Home* where Mrs. Clavers expresses self-consciousness about her role as storyteller, she emphasizes the informality of her reporting. Moreover, Mrs. Clavers occasionally figures that reporting not as written but as spoken, lending her account an immediacy and intimacy that arises out of her oral performance. "I know this rambling gossiping style, this going back to take up dropped stitches, is not the orthodox way of telling one's story" (118), Mrs. Clavers confesses. Elsewhere, she admits, "But this is mere wandering. Association led me from my intent" (172).³⁸ This "wandering style" enables Mrs. Clavers to construct her audience as being yet another Montacute neighbor with whom she may gossip. Though the reader is conceived initially as being an easterner who is foreign to the backwoods culture that Mrs. Clavers describes, Mrs. Clavers insists on ultimately inviting the reader into that culture through her narrative tactics.

Patricia Meyer Spacks notes that gossip often solidifies group identity. "Gossip," she writes, "demands a process of relatedness among its participants; its *I*'s inevitably turn into a *we*" (261). A "liminal position between public and private," gossip, Spacks points out, can function both to subvert and to reinforce existing social structures (262). As I suggested earlier, a number of critics of *A New Home* have read Mrs. Clavers's gossiping text as an imposition of her urban, east coast values on her rural Michigan surroundings—a consolidation of Mrs. Clavers's and her readers' eastern identity at the

³⁸ Importantly, Mrs. Clavers's reference to her own gossiping occurs while she tells of her neighbor, Mrs. Nippers, the town gossip who possesses the uncanny ability to "know all about" every minute event and the unrestrained desire "to tell it to everybody who will listen" to her (172). While the point of her story is to criticize Mrs. Nippers and her indiscriminate gossiping, Mrs. Clavers nevertheless embraces the role of gossip herself.

expense of her western neighbors' identities. Janet Floyd, for instance, asserts that *A New Home* "does not embrace the democratic, communitarian forms it is argued to celebrate" (129). Floyd focuses her attention on the relationship between Mrs. Clavers and her audience, claiming that "the activity of gossip here identifies the community to which Kirkland perceives herself truly to belong: a community of readers who can share the jokes generated by the contrast between their own social sophistication and its absence in what is continually represented as an uncivilized space" (131). Similarly, Sandra Zagarell contends that Kirkland's text instructs her readers "in how to prevail" (155) over their western neighbors. While Mrs. Clavers certainly identifies to some extent with her readers, she also identifies, as we have seen, with her new Michigan neighbors. Mrs. Clavers does not so much belong to one or the other of these communities but navigates between them. Gossiping is less an objectification of those neighbors' attitudes than an expression thereof: the wildness of Mrs. Clavers's narrative style corresponds with her geographical location.

Indeed, Mrs. Clavers adopts her gossiping style not to alienate readers from this community but to incorporate them into it. Rather than asserting the legitimacy of one community over another, Mrs. Clavers creates a subjective space through which readers can vicariously experience Montacute life, through which readers may become the *we* of Montacute. One episode in particular characterizes Mrs. Clavers's strategies in addressing her audience. In a chapter detailing the custom of borrowing that prevails on the frontier, Mrs. Clavers teases her audience with information she forbears passing along:

The identical glass tube which I offered Mrs. Howard, as a substitute for Mrs. Doubleday's baby, and which had already, frail as it is, threaded the country for miles in all directions, is, even as I write, in demand; a man on horseback comes from somewhere near Danforth's, and asks in mysterious whispers for———but I shall not tell what he calls it. The reader must come to Michigan. (107)

On the one hand, this passage reinforces the cultural divide between Mrs. Clavers's local knowledge and her readership's continued ignorance. That readers remain in the dark about what these "mysterious whispers" signify suggests their separation from the village. They remain outside of this community that borrows freely from one another and that speaks a specialized language. But on the other hand, Mrs. Clavers's refusal to disclose these "mysterious whispers" attempts to inspire readers to cross those boundaries that separate them from the village life about which they are reading. They are invited to situate themselves, like Everard and Cora Hastings, in the wilderness of Michigan, and not to separate themselves from it as the B—s have done. Indeed, Mrs. Clavers's inclusion of the cautionary tale about the B—s demonstrates to the audience the type of response to the frontier that is to be avoided. The interjected "even as I write" emphasizes that such an identification is possible *now*. Further, Mrs. Clavers's apparent assertion of a distinction between herself and her audience actually becomes the vehicle through which she encourages readerly participation. In refusing to tell what the man on horseback asks for, Mrs. Clavers shifts the burden from herself as a narrator of her experiences to the readers as potential participants in this borrowing economy. It is not her responsibility to tell, but her readers' responsibility to find out.

Such a narrative strategy marks Mrs. Clavers as what Robyn Warhol has termed an engaging narrator (29). In *Gendered Interventions*, Warhol distinguishes engaging

narrators from distancing ones: “Generally speaking, a distancing narrator discourages the actual reader from identifying with the narratee, while an engaging narrator encourages that identification” (31). Noting that “the way one experiences the fiction is affected by how personally one can take its addresses to ‘you’” (32), Warhol catalogs several narrative strategies that may heighten such readerly identification with the narratee. Engaging narrators “will usually either avoid naming the narratee or use names that refer to large classes of potential actual readers” (33), often speaking to a “you” who remains largely uncharacterized. More often than not, engaging narrators “assume that their narratees (not to mention their actual readers) are in perfect sympathy with them” (37). Finally, engaging narrators will intrude into the fiction not in the playful ways of a distancing narrator but rather to assert that the fictional representations “reflect real-world conditions for which the readers should take active responsibility after putting aside the book” (41). Throughout her narration in *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?*, Mrs. Clavers employs such engaging tactics to encourage her readers to participate actively in the construction of the new home of the frontier. Mrs. Clavers writes to a largely uncharacterized narratee, and instead of assuming that her audience is in perfect sympathy with her, Mrs. Clavers uses her emigrant’s guide genre to guide the audience’s understanding of Montacute so that it accords with her experience. As evidenced by the passage quoted above, Mrs. Clavers insists on a real-world response to her writing, inviting the reader into the community of Montacute not only through the vicarious experience of reading but also by encouraging westward emigration.

That the issue of readerly participation arises in this passage is especially significant, for Mrs. Clavers's discussion of borrowing emphasizes the communal importance of that practice in Montacute. Borrowing is a reciprocal relationship that binds neighbor to neighbor in a web of interdependence. Although Mrs. Clavers partly resists the demands of this practice (she calls attention to its excessiveness and underscores the tactless manner in which her neighbors ask to borrow her personal belongings),³⁹ she ultimately affirms the necessity of recognizing her dependence upon her neighbors:

What can be more absurd than a feeling of proud distinction, where a stray spark of fire, a sudden illness, or a day's contre-temps, may throw you entirely upon the kindness of your humblest neighbor? If I treat Mrs. Timson with neglect to-day, can I with any face borrow her broom to-morrow? And what would become of me, if in revenge for my declining her invitation to tea this afternoon, she should decline coming to do my washing on Monday? (100–101)

Mrs. Clavers extends a similar invitation to her readers: to move beyond their absurd feelings of proud distinction to recognize the inevitable interconnectedness of life in the Michigan backwoods, to join her and her neighbors in constructing the *we* of this new home. Having negotiated her way through the Michigan wilderness and into the Montacute community, Mrs. Clavers narrates that experience in the hope that her audience will follow her example. It is in this light that she closes *A New Home* by

³⁹ Mrs. Clavers explains: "For my own part, I have lent my broom, my thread, my tape, my spoons, my cat, my thimble, my scissors, my shawl, my shoes; and have been asked for my combs and brushes; and my husband, for his shaving apparatus and his pantaloons." The "cream of the joke," she goes on to say, "lies in the manner of the thing. It is so straight-forward and honest, none of your hypocritical civility and servile gratitude!" (103). William S. Osborne notes that the Kirklands found the western habit of borrowing "outrageous and personally annoying" (46).

offering her audience a “conclusion wherein nothing is concluded,” suggesting the ongoing nature of her project by once again enticing her reader to “call when you come to town” (233).

The close of Kirkland’s text highlights her differences from Irving. Whereas Irving ends by emphasizing his sense of isolation, Kirkland closes with an extension of communal feeling to her reader. Ultimately, these two sensibilities are grounded in the two authors’ responses to the land before them. While both authors engage in an intense negotiation between the wilderness and home through their texts, Kirkland is ultimately able to incorporate those two geographies while Irving must retreat from the prairies to the security of human habitations. Although Irving flirts with blurring the lines between home and wilderness, *A Tour* ends by reaffirming such a sharp distinction: the settled, eastern United States, not the prairies, are where Irving is most at home, and even that identification is called into question. Such a sense of homelessness even at “home” is one that we will see resurface in different ways in the travel texts of George William Curtis and Mark Twain. Kirkland’s *A New Home—Who’ll Follow?*, in contrast, picks up on the trope of figuring nature as a domestic space but does so in a way that avoids asserting human dominance over landscape. Instead, through Mary Clavers, Kirkland offers a vision of frontier settlement that affirms not only community among humans but also between humans and nature. As such, it is an important early articulation of the interconnections between home and wilderness, imagining the two not as antagonistic forces but as complementary concepts. Just as Kirkland anticipates the nationalist call of Emerson’s “The Poet,” so too does she anticipate the writings of Henry David Thoreau,

whose works would explore in greater detail and in more radical terms the wilderness as home. In the next chapter, I turn to Thoreau in an effort to illuminate his distinctive view as well as to uncover the continuities between his work, that of Kirkland, and the larger literary tradition of which they are a part.

CHAPTER 2

“A VERY CENTRE OF CIVILIZATION”: HENRY DAVID THOREAU AND THE NATURALIZED HOME

In “The Allegash and East Branch,” the third of his travelogues about journeying through the wilderness of Maine’s north woods, Henry David Thoreau describes the difficulties of finding a suitable camp along the boggy banks of the Penobscot River. “But the place which you have selected for your camp,” Thoreau goes on to explain, “though never so rough and grim, begins at once to have its attractions, and becomes a very centre of civilization to you: ‘Home is home, be it never so homely’” (*Maine Woods* 385–86). Thoreau’s conception of nature as home, as the “very centre of civilization,” radically extends Caroline Kirkland’s subtle negotiation between home and nature by effacing the distinctions between the two terms. Moreover, Thoreau re-casts his own sense of alienation from the land—akin to that which Irving experiences on the prairies—as a paradoxical affirmation of his fundamental connection to nature. Indeed, to an extent unmatched by any other nineteenth-century American author, Thoreau was persistently concerned with the relationship between the individual and the natural world. His two-year residence at Walden Pond was an experiment aimed at exploring precisely that relationship. As he explains in *Walden* (1854), “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” (343). Moving

to the Walden woods allowed Thoreau “to live a primitive and frontier life” (267), one in close contact with the natural processes of the place itself. The deliberateness with which Thoreau pursued these questions, in his earlier works as well as in *Walden*, has established him as a central figure in shaping American ideas of the wilderness.

While *Walden* rightly stands as Thoreau’s central articulation of a naturalized life, in two important earlier works Thoreau can be seen working through the links between home, nature, and the individual. “A Winter Walk” (a reflective essay that appeared in *The Dial* in 1843) and “Ktaadn” (Thoreau’s account of his travel to the Maine wilderness that was serialized in the *Union Magazine* in 1848) are significant texts in their own right, and they also provide an important context for *Walden*, for in many ways they illustrate Thoreau’s fundamental idea that the individual’s sense of home is best actualized in relation to nature.¹ “A Winter Walk” and “Ktaadn” might usefully be read as essential precursors of *Walden*. Don Scheese notes that “*Walden* is justly famous and seminal because it resolves a central conflict in American culture: the tension between wilderness and civilization” (41), but “A Winter Walk” and “Ktaadn” should perhaps be regarded as the truly seminal texts through which Thoreau effects that resolution by further undermining the logic that pits culture against nature. These two works, I argue, are Thoreau’s “extreme statement[s]” (“Walking” 592), for taken together they assert that the individual can be at home in nature in *both* the apparent domesticity of a New England farmhouse *and* the grim wilderness of the Maine woods. In this way, Thoreau’s representation of nature as home can also be distinguished from Caroline Kirkland’s

¹ In *The Shores of America*, Sherman Paul simultaneously dismisses Thoreau’s travel books as “minor works” and acknowledges that they “have been read at a discount” (355). Paul points out that *Walden* has inevitably overshadowed these works, and while I want to suggest ways in which “A Winter Walk” and “Ktaadn” provide an important context for *Walden*, my focus remains primarily on these earlier essays.

portrayal in *A New Home—Who'll Follow?*, for while Kirkland works to incorporate her home into its natural environment, Thoreau offers a more extreme vision of the link between the concepts of wilderness and home. Home is not simply established in accord with nature, but rather nature itself is home. In his extension of Kirkland's ideas, Thoreau also clearly differs from Irving, for he largely embraces the form of wild, unruly nature from which Irving retreats at the end of *A Tour on the Prairies*. Finally, while I argue that Thoreau's "extreme statements" certainly differentiate him from the other authors discussed in this dissertation to some extent, I also contend that important continuities exist between Thoreau, Kirkland, Taylor, and Jackson, in particular, and that these continuities enable us to see not only the connections between wilderness and home but also the connections among these authors across the period.

Numerous critics have illustrated that Thoreau's relationship with nature was at best an ambivalent one characterized by conflicting associations, and they have contended that this ambivalence particularly emerges in Thoreau's response to the Maine wilderness. In *Dark Thoreau*, for example, Richard Bridgman argues that "Ktaadn" is marked by "a sense of destruction and negativity" and by "Thoreau's disapproval of most of what he encounters" (189–90). James McIntosh similarly notes Thoreau's complicated response to nature, claiming that Thoreau "shifts his attitudes within individual works. In those shifts one can discern an exciting interplay between contrasting perspectives, and one can also discover how Thoreau uses his interplay as a means to an end—the truthful representation of his mixed relation with nature" (10).² Despite his inconsistent, shifting

² McIntosh's book on Thoreau's "shifting stance toward nature" is a nuanced, comprehensive study of Thoreau's ongoing negotiation of his relationship with nature. "[A]s a self-conscious romantic," McIntosh writes, Thoreau "is always aware, with varying degrees of awareness depending on the occasion, that he

response to nature, at the “very centre” of each of Thoreau’s encounters with the natural world resides a consistent response: faced with the nagging question of how the individual could live in better accord with the principles of the natural world, Thoreau turns—like others before him—to a language of domestic metaphors and associations of home. While some critics have seen such turns in Thoreau’s writing as his desperate attempt to domesticate an otherwise unruly, “untameable” nature,³ I argue that Thoreau accomplishes the exact opposite through such passages: figuring the “attractions” of nature as another form of civilization, Thoreau undermines the traditional meaning of civilization and asserts (however tentatively at times) the primary value of the natural world.

As the passage from “The Allegash and East Branch” suggests, Thoreau’s use of such domestic language was not nearly as conventional as it was in the hands of other nineteenth-century authors. Home *is* home for Thoreau—but as we shall see, it certainly was “never so homely” in the typical ways. His self-conscious wordplay underscores the difference at the heart of Thoreau’s conception of home. For him, it was not a matter of carving out a home from an otherwise uninhabitable wilderness but rather of naturalizing his own attitudes and actions so that they aligned with his environment. In this passage about the banks of the Penobscot, Thoreau hints at how a “rough and grim” camp is transformed into the “very centre of civilization.” However, civilization never completely

cannot achieve identity or perfect sharing with nature” (19). The struggle for Thoreau, McIntosh contends, is determining how close he may approach nature.

³ For example, David M. Robinson writes of Thoreau’s experiences at North Twin Lake in *The Maine Woods*: “The assertion of the non-human condition that Thoreau finds at the lake is undercut by the domestic metaphors that he applies to the wilderness” (213). Bridgman likewise suggests that the conclusion of “Ktaadn,” Thoreau’s expansive praise of the potential signified by the Maine wilderness, is “no more than rhetoric at work, trying to neutralize unwelcome discoveries” (205).

displaces nature in Thoreau's vision; instead, with all of its "attractions," nature "begins to seem *at once*" like civilization (my emphasis). Confronted with a seemingly foreign terrain, the individual is nevertheless immediately at home in it.

In this chapter, I use Thoreau's late essay "Walking, or The Wild" as an entry point before turning to a close examination of the ways in which Thoreau negotiates the borders between wilderness and civilization in "A Winter Walk" and "Ktaadn." As I've suggested, these two works might be said to form the extremes of Thoreau's statement about the relationship between the individual and nature. "A Winter Walk" is often regarded primarily for its evocation of domesticity, but I argue that such a focus solely on the domestic misses Thoreau's crucial assertion that the home is fundamentally underwritten by nature. "Ktaadn" initially seems to be the polar opposite of "A Winter Walk." Whereas the earlier essay focuses on the pastoral locale surrounding a New England farmhouse, the later narrative sets as its goal the "stern and savage" woods of the remote Maine wilderness (107). "Ktaadn," however, does not contradict "A Winter Walk" as much as *complement* it. Indeed, having written nature *into* the home in "A Winter Walk," Thoreau writes nature *as* home in "Ktaadn." For Thoreau, unlike for many of his expansionist contemporaries (such as Washington Irving or George William Curtis, for example), envisioning nature as home does not mean transforming the wilderness into a cultivated plot; rather, it means naturalizing the home so that it and the individual are always in close, deep contact with the environment.

In making such an argument, and in focusing on "A Winter Walk" and "Ktaadn" as they inform *Walden*, I am suggesting that we need to reconsider Thoreau's attitude toward nature in these works. That is, "A Winter Walk" is not simply a "cheery" and

“cozy” domestic essay, just as “Ktaadn” does not evidence an inescapably “dark” vision of the wilderness as incompatible with Thoreau’s previous thinking. Rather, these essays are extreme statements in that they articulate a complicated vision of nature that affirms its benevolence even while acknowledging its potential hostility. Attending to the radical propositions embedded in these essays suggests ways we can reconsider *Walden*’s status as *the* central Thoreauvian statement about the relationship between the individual and the natural world, for while that text might be seen as celebrating a middle landscape between wilderness and civilization, these earlier essays assert a radical continuity between those poles. Thus, if this account of Thoreau’s conception of the wilderness as home (albeit an occasionally inhospitable one) reveals continuities with and revisions of such authors as Caroline Kirkland and Washington Irving, it also suggests that Thoreau critics must recognize the continuities among these works and revise our understanding of his nuanced position accordingly.

The Border Life:
“Walking, or The Wild”

Thoreau’s essay “Walking, or The Wild” offers a useful frame for my discussion of “A Winter Walk” and “Ktaadn,” largely because it includes some of Thoreau’s clearest articulations of the value of “wildness” and of the relationship between the individual and nature.⁴ Robert D. Richardson, Jr., has noted the essay’s significance: “As *Walden* is Thoreau’s central book, so ‘Walking’ is his central essay. The quality it identifies, that is, wildness, stands for much of what we still regard as characteristically Thoreauvian” (224). Although Richardson perhaps overemphasizes “Walking” as *the* essay that

⁴ Combining two of Thoreau’s lectures from 1851, the essay was first published in 1862. For ease of reference, I’ll refer to the essay simply as “Walking” from this point on.

identifies wildness as a core concept for Thoreau (for, as we will see, Thoreau was working through ideas of the wild in his earlier published work), he is correct to note the essay's central role in summarizing Thoreau's beliefs about that concept. "Walking" also articulates the philosophical foundation for the types of excursions Thoreau details in "A Winter Walk" and "Ktaadn," and Thoreau links his valuing of walking to his valuing of wildness. Whereas "Walking" outlines Thoreau's theories about wildness and its linkage of nature and home, the other two works (much like *Walden*) reveal Thoreau putting those ideas into practice.

Thoreau explains his aim in the opening paragraph of "Walking":

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil—to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization: the minister and the school committee and every one of you will take care of that. (592)

Drawing a clear line between himself (the prophetic "I") and his audience (the accusatory "every one of you"), Thoreau also draws a clear distinction between nature and civilization. The latter offers a freedom "merely civil" while the former holds the potential for an "absolute freedom and wildness." Despite announcing this sharp division at the opening of the essay, in "Walking" Thoreau does not care to deny the individual's connection to society so much as to illustrate what he perceives as the much more fundamental connection to the natural world. Importantly, he figures that connection as a type of "inhabitation," a relationship that posits the natural world as a home for the individual.

Thoreau's central argument in "Walking" is for an activity not merely physical but philosophical. He makes it clear that the walking that he advocates "has nothing in it akin to taking exercise," but rather is a vehicle for the more important activity of "ruminat[ing]" (596). The appropriate site for such thinking is not merely the outdoors, Thoreau suggests, but the *wild* outdoors. "When we walk," he writes, "we naturally go to the fields and woods: what would become of us, if we walked only in a garden or a mall?" (597). Thoreau's play on "naturally" here underscores his point: the garden and mall are still too closely linked with the society that has constructed them. Whereas "man's improvements . . . deform the landscape, and make it more and more tame and cheap" (598), the "forest and wilderness" provide "the tonics and barks which brace mankind" (610).⁵ Thoreau thus establishes a scale ranging from the total civilization of towns, to the improved landscapes of parks, to the unimproved space of the forest—and he clearly insists on this last category as the ideal. While such a scale is certainly not new, Thoreau's preference for the primeval (to borrow from Nash's language regarding his similar spectrum of environments) rather than the pastoral is significant. What Thoreau advocates is a complete immersion in nature, suggesting the way in which the forest can be the proper home for the individual: "Why not put my house, my parlor, behind this plot [of swamp], instead of behind that meager assemblage of curiosities, that poor apology for a Nature and Art, which I call my front yard?" (612). Thoreau thus

⁵ Barbara Nelson points out that "[a]lthough Thoreau definitely values wild places, wildness and wilderness are not interchangeable signifiers in his mind" (257–58). Laura Dassow Walls reminds us, however, that Thoreau saw "wildness" and "wilderness" as "working in concert, each completing the other" (17).

expresses his extreme desire not for a space “contrived” by “human art” but for the “marrow” of Nature—for there, he suggests, is where the individual and society can best be “recreate[d]” (613).

Although Thoreau believes such a swamp-house would be ideal, he clearly acknowledges that such a wholesale turn to nature is at best an elusive goal. “For my part,” he admits toward the end of “Walking,” “I feel that with regard to Nature I live a sort of border life, on the confines of a world into which I make occasional and transient forays only” (625). Thoreau’s idea of the “border life” is a crucial one, for it represents the ongoing negotiation between the natural and social worlds that is central to both “A Winter Walk” and “Ktaadn.” Indeed, those essays can be said to document two of Thoreau’s “occasional and transient forays” into nature. Although Thoreau advocates “a wildness whose glance no civilization can endure” (610) in “Walking,” this extreme rhetoric is intended to shift emphasis away from the “merely civil” and to acknowledge the pervasiveness of nature.

In his essay on wildness in “Walking,” Richard Schneider argues that the essay is far from being the “extreme statement” that Thoreau claims it to be. Reading the essay’s rhetoric in connection with nineteenth-century American westering myths, Schneider argues that Thoreau’s reliance on Arnold Guyot’s theories of geographical determinism imply Thoreau’s celebration not of the unsettled wilderness but rather of the march of civilization. Thoreau “champions civilization by championing wildness,” Schneider writes. “The purpose of wildness is to refresh civilization, not reject it” (49). While Schneider is right in his assessment of Thoreau’s belief about the purpose of wildness, he fails to acknowledge that Thoreau imagines wildness as fundamentally altering the kind

of civilization that is possible. It is not a question of accepting or rejecting civilization but rather of *transforming* it. As Thoreau writes, “Hope and the future for me are not in lawns and cultivated fields, not in towns and cities, but in the impervious and quaking swamps” (611). For Thoreau, nature’s promise exists not in its being “subdued to man” (611) but rather in its continuing resistance to such subjection; or, to cast it in terms of Irving’s narrative, Thoreau celebrates the reticent nature of the alarm camp rather than the commercially developed landscape of the honey camp. While Thoreau does indeed imagine a westward movement akin to manifest destiny, he envisions the West not simply as land to be settled but as an uninterrupted forest where “there are no towns nor cities . . . to disturb me” (603). While these statements initially seem to argue for a nature entirely separate from the individual and society, Thoreau elaborates his vision later in the essay, making clear the reciprocal relationship he imagines:

I would not have every man nor every part of a man cultivated, any more than I would have every acre of earth cultivated: part will be tillage, but the greater part will be meadow and forest, not only serving an immediate use, but preparing a mould against a distant future, by the annual decay of the vegetation which it supports. (622)

In “Walking,” then, Thoreau asserts not the need to choose wilderness over civilization but rather the need to “import the woods” back into the social world, to make the wilderness inform civilization in a way similar to Kirkland’s example of the Hastingses in *A New Home*. As Barbara Nelson points out, “Thoreau does not define the domestic and the wild as polar opposites, nor does he devalue or erase the domestic from our history” (263). Rather, as we will see from a close analysis of “A Winter Walk,” he writes the wildness of nature into the domesticity of the home. In many ways, this early

essay explores the border life between a rural farmhouse and its pastoral surroundings, and Thoreau subtly suggests that even a domestic space seemingly separated from nature is actually fundamentally connected to it.

The Subterranean Fire of “A Winter Walk”: Bringing Nature Home

Laura Dassow Walls points out that, for Thoreau, “Nature is not elsewhere, but everywhere” (24), and in “A Winter Walk” Thoreau sets out to illustrate precisely this point, albeit in a subtle manner that belies his more extreme contention. The essay, which was included in the October 1843 issue of *The Dial*, is one of Thoreau’s earliest published explorations of the relationship between the individual and nature.⁶ Written from an inclusive first-person plural point-of-view that encourages the reader to adopt the role of armchair tourist, the essay recounts Thoreau’s rural rambles during the course of a snowy winter day, as he heads away from his farmstead and tours the surrounding landscape.⁷ Despite its claim that a subterranean fire burning in nature corresponds to a slumbering insight in the individual, the essay, on its surface, appears to retreat from that

⁶ In *Henry Thoreau: A Life of the Mind*, Robert D. Richardson asserts that “A Winter Walk” is Thoreau’s “first fully mature piece of writing” (134). Similarly, in *The Shores of America*, Sherman Paul contends that the “method” Thoreau uses in this essay is “essentially that of his best work” (157). Other critics have also noted the significance of this early essay, with Robert H. Welker calling it “perhaps the most lyrical and evocative short prose work Thoreau ever wrote” (107) and Gordon E. Bigelow noting that the essay’s language “represents an important phase of [Thoreau’s] attempt to ‘personalize’ the landscape, to bring its sphere close to or within the human sphere” (15).

For more on how “A Winter Walk” came to be published in *The Dial* and on the contemporary response to the essay, see Steven Fink’s *Prophet in the Marketplace*, 112–14, 120.

⁷ As Fink points out, the essay actually “draws largely upon journal entries from the winters of 1840–1841 and 1841–1842,” which Thoreau “consciously shaped . . . into a popular form by working them into an imagined excursion of one day” (112). Despite its brevity (a single day) and its consequent limited range (the immediate neighborhood of Concord), the tour that comprises this winter walk might be considered a representative sampling of nature, for Thoreau takes us through meadows and fields, through a forested glen, around a lake, up a mountain, and down a river. Given the essay’s very local focus, it is important to note this gesture toward more global application: the local facts of “A Winter Walk” become a universal truth about the individual and nature.

assertion in its conclusion, returning instead to a domestic hearth enclosed by but separated from the natural world. As Henry Golemba has accurately noted, the essay “contains lines that rival the domestic coziness of Whittier’s ‘Snowbound’ or one of Longfellow’s ‘Fireside’ poems” (128). But to attend only to the “domestic coziness” of “A Winter Walk” is to miss the essay’s own subterranean fire, and to read Thoreau’s conclusion as solely a retreat from nature ultimately misses the complexity of his position. For Thoreau’s strategy in this essay is to inscribe a radical proposition about the connection between home and nature into an apparently conservative framework. Even as he describes a domestic space separated from its natural surroundings, he emphasizes a fundamental link between these opposed concepts, and his stylistic choice of first-person plural narration invites his readers to identify with the experiences he recounts. By focusing on the two “domestic” spaces described in the essay, the woodsman’s hut and the farmer’s hearth, we can see how Thoreau incorporates nature into the home.

Thoreau’s tactics are evident from the beginning of the essay, as he opens “A Winter Walk” with two paragraphs that simultaneously establish a distinction and—however implicitly—a correspondence between humans and nature. The first paragraph, written in the past tense, focuses primarily on a natural world bereft of human presence during a nighttime snow storm and sets the stage for Thoreau’s subsequent daytime excursion into his snow-covered surroundings. Thoreau begins the essay by describing how the wind “gently murmured,” “puffed with feathery softness,” and “occasionally sighed” throughout the night—all details that introduce a generally benevolent nature and that create what Fink labels “a mood of comfortable domesticity in nature” (115). Just as the wind treats the cabin gently, so too is animal life handled with care. Thoreau notes

that “the meadow mouse has slept in his snug gallery in the sod,” and that numerous other animals “have all been housed” during the night. This view of a peaceful, beneficent nature reaches its apex as Thoreau extends his description even further: “The earth itself has slept” (211).

But the portrait of nature that Thoreau gives us in this opening paragraph is a nuanced one, partaking both of the “domestic coziness” noted above and, more subtly, a striking bleakness. Even as Thoreau casts nature as a comforting force, he also suggests its ability to alienate the individual: for as the earth sleeps, the single sound of a creaking hinge amidst this “forlorn nature” serves to “advertis[e] us of a remote inward warmth, a divine cheer and fellowship, where gods are met together, but where it is very bleak for men to stand” (211). The movement of this passage is crucial, for it initially suggests that humankind may partake of this advertised fellowship, only to deny such participation in the second half of the sentence. The feathery and gentle nature of the opening sentences is also a nature that is, at best, occasionally indifferent to man’s plight.

Thoreau’s second paragraph immediately begins deconstructing the distinctions he has made in the essay’s opening paragraph. Most notably, Thoreau mirrors his previous descriptions with his account of his morning perceptions, establishing a parallel between himself and the animals described in the first paragraph: “We sleep and at length awake to the still reality of a winter morning” (211). The language of the first paragraph is further echoed here—the “divine cheer” available in nature becomes the “snug cheer within” Thoreau’s cottage. Casting himself as yet another animal that has been “housed” during the night, Thoreau returns to a vision of nature as generally benevolent—and, importantly, a vision of nature as fundamentally pervading human habitation. Although

he looks out the window to survey “some clear space over the fields,” what Thoreau emphasizes is how the snow covers man-made objects: the roofs, eaves, fences, and walls of this country farmstead. Rather than being a sign of nature’s bleakness, however, this scene signals the potentially harmonious relationship between nature and the individual: it is “as if nature had strewn her fresh designs over the fields by night as models for man’s art” (211).

These opening paragraphs thus establish one of the central tensions not only of the essay but also of much of Thoreau’s writing as a whole: nature here is both familiar and alien, cheering and bleak, homelike and wild. Thoreau describes the early morning scene into which he enters as “dim and spectral . . . , like the shadowy realms” (212). The predominant sensibility of “A Winter Walk,” however, is the individual’s fundamental connection to a “genial” and “warm” nature. And in this essay, Thoreau expresses that connection by applying imagery of the domestic to his encounter with pastoral nature. For example, Thoreau writes of entering the woods: “We enter within their covert as we go under the roof of a cottage” (214). Later, he describes coming upon a woodland lake: “We fancy ourselves in the interior of a larger house” (220). He thus casts nature as an equally appropriate home for the individual, and he builds on that figure through the central image of the essay: the “slumbering subterranean fire in nature which never goes out, and which no cold can chill” (215). Thoreau proceeds to explain the deep-seated correspondence between this natural phenomenon and the individual spirit: “This subterranean fire has its altar in each man’s breast, for in the coldest day, and on the bleakest hill, the traveler cherishes a warmer fire within the folds of his cloak than is kindled on any hearth. A healthy man, indeed, is the complement of the seasons, and in

winter, summer is in his heart” (215). At its core, then, the self is more closely allied to nature than to culture; we are warmed more by this inner summer than by that central figure of the social world, the hearth. But even as Thoreau appears to be asserting a rigid distinction between nature (the fire) and the domestic (the hearth) here, he also aligns the two: “[t]he steam which rises from swamps and pools is as dear and domestic as that of our own kettle” (215). The seeming contradiction between these two assertions—what James McIntosh labels Thoreau’s “philosophical contrary-mindedness” (11)—reveals the complexity of Thoreau’s stance toward nature and the domestic in “A Winter Walk.” That complexity can be best examined by turning to a comparison of the two prominent domestic spaces of the essay: the deserted woodsman’s hut and the farmer’s hearth with which Thoreau concludes “A Winter Walk.”

Arguably the central episode of the essay, Thoreau’s examination of the woodsman’s hut rests on his theory of nature’s subterranean fire and tests the validity of his beliefs about “the life that is in nature, the furred life” (216). In several of Thoreau’s texts, the wood-chopper figures as a core example of a fully naturalized man: one who lives in close, prolonged contact with nature, away from the “gadding town” (214) and the attendant distractions of the civilized world.⁸ Thoreau’s representation of wood-choppers, however, is not a single-minded celebration. For instance, Alek Therien, the Canadian wood-chopper Thoreau discusses in the “Visitors” chapter of *Walden*, is a “simple and natural man” (395) in whom “the animal man chiefly was developed” (397). Thoreau criticizes Therien for failing “to take the spiritual view of things”: although

⁸ Fishing and fisherman are another example that Thoreau frequently uses, both in “A Winter Walk” and elsewhere in his writing. Later in the essay, Thoreau writes of the fisherman: “He belongs to the natural family of man, and is planted deeper in nature and has more root than the inhabitants of towns” (224). Thoreau’s attitude toward lumbermen tends to be more complicated than that toward fisherman.

Therien suggests a certain kind of “genius,” it has been insufficiently developed (400).

Thoreau expresses similar concerns about lumbermen in “Chesuncook,” where he asserts that it is the poet and not the wood-chopper who “makes the truest use of the pine” (*Maine Woods* 164). These critiques notwithstanding, Thoreau does praise lumbermen for the ways in which they make nature their home, and it is precisely this transformation that Thoreau focuses on in “A Winter Walk.”

Leading up to the hut episode, Thoreau insists on his increasingly remote location. As he will similarly do in “Ktaadn,” Thoreau calls attention to the distance he has traveled from the domestic scene from which he began his walk and underscores his progress toward nature: “Silently we unlatch the door. . . . Opening the gate, we tread briskly. . . . At length we have reached the edge of the woods” (211–14). Thoreau thus establishes a narrative progression that ostensibly leads us away from the domestic, calling attention to his crossing of boundaries as he goes. He notes that he is “standing quite alone, far in the forest,” in “this lonely glen” where “reign the simplicity and purity of a primitive age, and a health and hope far remote from towns and cities” (217).⁹ Ultimately, however, Thoreau’s progress away from the farmhouse is toward that “larger house” of nature, and the woodsman’s hut stands as a key image of the potential to inhabit nature as if it were the individual’s home.

Implicitly comparing the hut to his description of “the submarine cottages of the caddice worms” (216), Thoreau foregrounds the physical composition of the woodsman’s home. If Thoreau uses first-person narration and direct address of his audience throughout “A Winter Walk” to heighten his readers’ sense of immediacy, here he

⁹ This is an earlier version of Thoreau’s similar pronouncement in “Walking” that hope and the future are to be found in the forests and swamps and not in gardens or towns.

intensifies that experience by joining a dense repetition of demonstrative pronouns with his other narrative tactics. While his approach here is not as thoroughgoing as that of Mrs. Clavers in Kirkland's *A New Home*, Thoreau similarly employs his style to reinforce the content of his essay by encouraging readerly participation. Although this furred life may be far remote from towns and cities, Thoreau closes that distance through his description:

Let us go into this deserted woodman's hut, and see how he has passed the long winter nights and the short and stormy days. For here man has lived under this south hill-side. . . . These hemlocks whispered over his head, these hickory logs were his fuel, and these pitch pine roots kindled his fire; yonder foaming rill in the hollow, whose thin and airy vapor still ascends as busily as ever, though he is far off now, was his well. These hemlock boughs, and the straw upon this raised platform, were his bed, and this broken dish held his drink. But he has not been here this season, for the phæbes built their nest upon this shelf last summer. (217)

These details illustrate the ways in which the woodsman has converted the natural landscape into his domestic space, and the birds' nest that now occupies the shelf suggests the interchangeability of the hut's inhabitants. Like the caddice worms, the birds, and the "many quadrupeds" (218) that frequent the neighborhood, the woodsman led a "furred life" while in living in the hut, for he was perpetually surrounded by nature. While Thoreau insists on the material *presence* of the woodsman's hut, however, his account cannot help but record the absence of the woodsman himself. Thoreau's present-tense narration of his journey gives way to past-tense speculation about the woodsman's life. Although such a shift in verb tense could be seen as limiting the immediacy of this scene, the demonstrative pronouns counteract such a tendency by asserting the present value of the hut itself.

Despite its seclusion and naturalness, Thoreau paradoxically labels the woodsman's hut "a civilized and public spot" (217), and the fact that the woodsman no longer occupies this hut does not detract from his power as an example. Thoreau sees in the traces of the hut a larger history of "the tattle of cities . . . those larger huts . . . in High-streets, and Broad-ways" (218). Just as he previously describes the woods as being like a cottage, here he figures cities in reference to the woodsman's hut. He thereby attempts to naturalize the civilized and domestic life of towns and settlements, and he extends this thinking in the scene that immediately follows his visit to the woodsman's hut. Leaving the site of the hut and climbing to a hilltop, Thoreau spots the smoke from a farmhouse rising above the surrounding forest. His description of the sight collapses the distinction between the domestic and nature:

There must be a warmer and more genial spot there below, as where we detect the vapor from a spring forming a cloud above the trees. . . . Up goes the smoke as silently and naturally as the vapor exhales from the leaves, and as busy disposing itself in wreathes as the housewife on the hearth below. It is a hieroglyphic of man's life, and suggests more intimate and important things than the boiling of a pot. Where its fine column rises above the forest, like an ensign, some human life has planted itself,—and such is the beginning of Rome, the establishment of the arts, and the foundation of empires, whether on the prairies of America, or the steppes of Asia. (219)

Thoreau's insistence on organic metaphors here asserts a fundamental link between even this homestead's hearth and its forest surroundings, and, indeed, posits this link as necessary not simply for the health of individuals but also for the health of nations, a topic he addresses more extensively in the conclusion to "Ktaadn."¹⁰ Although this "rural

¹⁰ This passage can potentially be seen as endorsing a form of manifest destiny, whereby the advancing "empire" eventually and inevitably erases the natural environment that preceded it. Such a reading would be akin to Schneider's interpretation of "Walking." While Thoreau certainly employs such imperialist rhetoric on occasion, his view of the role of nature is fundamentally not based on the typical consumptive or exploitative ethic of manifest destiny.

homestead” clearly differs significantly from the woodsman’s hut, Thoreau nevertheless sees it as similarly expressing the inescapable fact of the individual’s life in nature—that “more important and intimate thin[g] than the boiling of a pot.” Thoreau’s previous clear distinction between the chaos of civilization and the serenity to be found in nature no longer holds. Rather, what Thoreau insists on is the “subterranean” influence nature has on us, even as we move out of its environs and back to human habitations. It is precisely this influence that Thoreau describes in the conclusion of “A Winter Walk,” and in its validation of even this transient foray into nature, it reveals the value of the “border life” he describes in “Walking.”

If much of “A Winter Walk” is primarily intended to celebrate the life lived in deep contact with nature, Thoreau’s turn to the domestic hearth at the end of the essay initially seems directly contrary to that purpose. Indeed, it is this conclusion that leads Golemba to emphasize the essay’s “domestic coziness” at the expense of acknowledging its more radical assertion about nature’s subterranean fire. Concluding both his daytime excursion and his essay’s exploration of the boundaries between the natural and the human, Thoreau returns to the literal and figurative comfort of the “inward life,” to the farmstead home from which he set out in the morning. Importantly, this return occurs just after the snowstorm resumes and nature “reassert[s] her rule” by “blot[ting] out the traces of men” (224). This storm is not merely a resurfacing of the “bleak” nature that figures in the essay’s opening paragraph, however, and Thoreau’s foray into nature does not end solely with a retreat to a familiar domestic space. Rather, as Thoreau claims, “The snow levels all things, and infolds them deeper on the bosom of nature” (225). The snow-bound farmhouse is thus simultaneously a refuge from and a reconnection to nature, for the

snow transforms the farmhouse into a subterranean habitation and aligns the hearth of the domestic with the wild fire burning in nature. Thoreau is thus in nature just as much indoors as outdoors. Although the essay's final passages do provide powerful images of human separation from the out-of-doors, they also reassert the fundamental connection with the natural world:

In winter we lead a more inward life. Our hearts are warm and merry, like cottages under drifts, whose windows and doors are half concealed, but from whose chimneys the smoke cheerfully ascends. The imprisoning drifts increase the sense of comfort which the house affords, and in the coldest days we are content to sit over the hearth and see the sky through the chimney top, enjoying the quiet and serene life that may be had in a warm corner by the chimney side, or feeling our pulse by listening to the low of cattle in the street, or the sound of the flail in distant barns all the long afternoon. . . . We enjoy now, not an oriental, but a boreal leisure. . . .

. . . Now commences the long winter evening around the farmer's hearth, when the thoughts of the indwellers travel far abroad, and men are by nature and necessity liberal to all creatures. Now is the happy resistance to cold, when the farmer reaps his reward . . . for now the storm is over. . . (225–26)

Abandoning the earlier correspondence between nature's "slumbering subterranean fire" and his own "inward heat" in favor of a link between the domestic hearth and his "warm and merry" heart, Thoreau implies here that the appropriate model for the self is the one realized while sitting by the hearth in the cottage, not while wandering in the nearby woods. Thoreau's shift from the ideal figure of the woodsman to that of the farmer also suggests such a separation: for while the farmer may cultivate the earth and live a life dependent on his use of the soil, his existence is not so fully in and of nature as is the woodsman's. Indeed, whereas the woodsman's hut was built out of and into nature, the farmer's house appears designed to keep nature out.

But this passage also involves yet another set of associations that prevents the end of "A Winter Walk" from simply being about the domestic coziness of the farmer's

hearth. As Sherman Paul points out, “Always concerned with the conditions and sources of inspiration, Thoreau wanted to remind his neighbors of their dependence on nature” (168–69). Thoreau underscores that dependence by echoing his descriptions of the woodsman here in his description of the farmer. Playing on the meaning of “boreal” as signifying both the north and its flora, Thoreau suggests that this farmhouse life is nevertheless connected to the surrounding forests. The “quiet and serene life” Thoreau describes here is exactly the kind of life he claims is available in nature. Moreover, this turn to the domestic scene can be read as an illustration of Thoreau’s belief that snow brings everything closer to nature. The passage establishes a parallel between the “furred life” and the “inward life,” asserting nature’s fundamental connection to the individual—even when the individual is comfortably housed by the hearth. Indeed, the hearth becomes the center of Thoreau’s parallel. Speculating about how the woodsman might have spent his winter nights, Thoreau writes earlier in the essay: “through this broad chimney-throat, in the late winter evening, ere he stretched himself upon the straw, he looked up to learn the progress of the storm, and seeing the bright stars of Cassiopeia’s chair shining brightly down upon him, fell contentedly asleep” (218). For both the farmer and the woodsman, then, the chimney is a vital connection between self and nature, a source of warmth and contentment that arises partly from the social and domestic sphere but also from the natural world.¹¹ In this way, Thoreau writes nature into the home, but

¹¹ The chimney is also a particularly *gendered* image of male domesticity. Donald G. Mitchell’s *Reveries of a Bachelor*, for instance, links the progressing blaze of its narrator’s fireplace to his reverie concerning marriage. Mitchell casts the debate in conventional terms of the (masculine) freedom to travel versus the (feminine) confinement of domesticity: “Shall a man who has been free to chase his fancies over the wide-world, without lett or hindrance, shut himself up to marriage-ship, within four walls called Home, that are to claim him, his time, his trouble, and his tears, thenceforward forever more, without doubts thick, and thick-coming as Smoke?” (19). Thoreau actually revises Mitchell’s conventional attitude by suggesting that, paradoxically, the enclosed farmhouse enables its inhabitants to “travel far abroad.”

he does so in such a way to “blot out” the extremity of his case. “A Winter Walk” can thus be seen as a relatively conventional celebration of the “domestic coziness” of the hearth, but more importantly, it is also a radical proposition about how nature’s subterranean fire is equally part of that coziness. Having thus constructed the pastoral countryside as a home and the home as a natural space, Thoreau would turn in “Ktaadn” to another extreme statement: imagining the “grim, untrodden wilderness” (*Maine Woods* 12) of Maine as a home for himself.

Naturalizing Man, Peopling the Wilderness:
“Ktaadn”

Whereas the rambles and reflections of “A Winter Walk” ultimately enable Thoreau to incorporate the pastoral natural world he encounters into his genial and cheery conception of the domestic hearth, Thoreau’s travels to the north woods of Maine pose a further complication in his relation to nature.¹² In “Ktaadn,” Thoreau confronts nature in a very specific form, the wilderness—an “untamed” space that is not as easily reconciled with competing notions of civilization or the domestic. Nevertheless, throughout this account of his 1846 journey from Concord to the upper slopes of Mount Katahdin, one of the most difficult mountain ascents in New England, Thoreau establishes an uneasy correspondence between nature and civilization wherein the two are not conceived simply as oppositional but as complementary. Even as Thoreau moves away from the town of Bangor and into the wilderness of the Maine woods, he constructs that

¹² John Tallmadge points out that “Ktaadn” can be read not only as an encounter with nature but also as being “about a writer’s encounter with writing.” That is, Thoreau’s account “exposes the inadequacy of received modes of conceiving and representing the natural world and calls attention to the duplicity of language, which can constitute as well as describe experience” (138). Anne Lundberg similarly focuses on Thoreau’s concern with language in the essays that comprise *The Maine Woods*. She argues that the Maine wilderness has an “unsettling effect” on Thoreau’s ideas about language. In “Ktaadn” and the other *Maine Woods* narratives, Lundberg contends, “word is inevitably separated from world by a fatal silence” (174).

wilderness environment as a surrogate home—first by way of the few human settlements he encounters and then through the natural world itself. Ironically, Thoreau’s naturalization occurs almost always in the “civilized” spaces he encounters. While the climax of “Ktaadn” does mark the limits of Thoreau’s ability to become fully naturalized and his capacity to fully demystify a nature that remains somewhat alien to him, too great an emphasis on the “destruction and negativity” (Bridgman 189) of this passage obscures Thoreau’s larger point: that nature, even the Maine wilderness, stern and savage as it is, can be equally gentle and civilizing.¹³

Thoreau opens “Ktaadn” by informing his reader of the motives behind and the goals for his excursion to Maine. Announcing his intention “to accompany a relative of mine engaged in the lumber trade . . . as far as a dam on the west branch of the Penobscot . . . [and] to make excursions to Mount Ktaadn, the second highest mountain in New England, about thirty miles distant, and to some of the lakes of the Penobscot, either alone or with such company as I might pick up there” (1), Thoreau also explains that he has chosen this route because it affords him the best chance of seeing the wilderness and experiencing the life of a boatman (2). Despite the fact that Thoreau’s trip is conjoined with the commercial interests of his relative’s timber business,¹⁴ for Thoreau this trip is focused on the wilderness experience itself: it is his chance to take up the “furred life” himself, and he has chosen his route accordingly.

¹³ There are numerous and varied interpretations of Thoreau’s experience in “Ktaadn.” While some, like Bridgman, read this passage as wholly disturbing for Thoreau, others, such as McIntosh (207) and Scheese (55–56), offer readings that reconcile this passage with Thoreau’s largely optimistic attitude toward nature. Similarly, Ronald Wesley Hoag argues that “[f]or Thoreau, Katahdin is a paradigm of correspondence,” because “the matter atop Katahdin is so intense and so pure that it is, therefore, so perfectly spiritual” (36). In contrast, R. H. DuPree comes to the exact opposite conclusion about “Ktaadn,” writing that its “dominant impression is of a great, spiritually empty space” (116).

¹⁴ For more on the convergence between commercial and industrial interests and the Maine woods, see Bernard W. Quetchenbach’s “Sauntering in the Industrial Wilderness.”

Thoreau is thus careful to detail his slow movement away from civilization, marking along the way the progress he is making toward his goal. Thoreau's venture into the Maine wilderness begins, appropriately enough, with a visit to a factory—a visit that immediately follows and is framed by his lament of the logging industry and its reckless despoliation of a previously pristine nature. Writing of the “prostrate forests” that are the result of logging, Thoreau describes the industry's imposition on nature: “The mills are built directly over and across the river. Here is a close jam, a hard rub, at all seasons; and then the once green tree, long since white, I need not say as the driven snow, but as a driven log, becomes lumber merely” (3). Unlike the woodsman's hut in “A Winter Walk,” the mills impose themselves on the landscape rather than situate themselves in accord with it. Further, transformed from its “once green” state into “lumber merely,” the pine is degraded by the commercial use to which it is put, and Thoreau's tone reinforces this degradation by shifting from his detached punning to a more sentimental portrait: “Think how stood the white-pine tree on the shore of Chesuncook, its branches souging with the four winds, and every individual needle trembling in the sunlight,—think how it stands now,—sold, perchance, to the New England Friction-Match Company!” (4). Thoreau's language throughout this passage—from focusing on the quietly majestic life of the individual pine to labeling the loggers “busy demons”—clearly reveals his antipathy toward New England logging practices.¹⁵

¹⁵ Furthermore, this lament is not merely Thoreau's, for he strategically invites his readers to adopt his perspective. Moving from the subtle “I need not say,” which attributes to the reader a certain level of understanding, to the direct command for us to think of the white pine *now*, Thoreau shifts the burden of response from the time of his observations to the time of our reading of those observations. We are thereby encouraged to make Thoreau's lament our own, an identification which is confirmed by his later use of the first person plural to describe the results of such unrestrained logging practices: “No wonder that we hear so often of vessels which are becalmed off our coast, being surrounded a week at a time by floating lumber from the Maine woods” (4). Thoreau's invitation to the reader is intensified here by his rhetoric, rendering

Given Thoreau's vivid, emotional lament for the "destiny" of the white pine, it is perhaps surprising that he immediately moves from this proto-environmentalist critique to a relatively objective description of a site of industrial production, the bateau manufactory. The factory relies on precisely those logging processes that Thoreau has just exposed; yet aside from remarking the "great waste" of white pine these boats cause "on account of their form" and the fact that these boats "wore out in two years, or often in a single trip" (5), Thoreau does not connect the production of bateaux to his larger critique of wasting natural resources. Indeed, the bateau comes to signify for Thoreau a melding of civilization and the natural, not, as with the lumber mills, the ascendance of one over the other. Noting in detail the natural resources that are used to construct the bateau, Thoreau goes on to explain, "There was something refreshing and wildly musical to my ears in the very name of the white man's canoe, reminding me of Charlevoix and Canadian Voyageurs. The batteau is a sort of mongrel between the canoe and the boat, a furtrader's boat" (5). Whereas the mills are associated (negatively) with mid-nineteenth century industrial production and civilization, the bateaux—in spite of their origins in and implication in that industrialization—are signifiers for a life separated from it. Thoreau's language is once again quite telling here. Reveling in the "refreshing and wildly musical" nature of the word *bateau* itself, Thoreau uses terms he most often applies to the natural world. Occupying its "mongrel" space between the American Indian canoe and the Euro-American boat, the bateau reinforces Thoreau's own assertion of his mongrel identity between (and beyond) that of backwoodsman and fashionable traveler. It is precisely this

the negative consequences of logging obvious: not only do "we" hear these stories, but it is "no wonder" that they are "so often" to be told.

concept of mongrel identity—or, to use the phrase he employs in “Walking,” the concept of a “border life”—that Thoreau develops in “Ktaadn” as he moves away from the civilization and industry of Bangor and toward the wilderness of Mount Katahdin.

As Thoreau and his companions make their way out of Bangor along the Houlton Road and into the Maine wilderness, he is careful to note the various signs of human settlement he witnesses. If the Bangor environs predominantly showcased human civilization’s impositions upon nature (as with the mills), north of Bangor Thoreau sees evidence of nature’s reclamation. Though the road itself is “kept in as good repair as almost any you will find anywhere” (7), several houses along the road reveal nature’s lingering power over human inhabitation. As Thoreau remarks, “Everywhere we saw signs of the great freshet,—this house standing awry, and that where it was not founded . . . and that other with a waterlogged look” (7). Thoreau craftily moves from his assessment of the road to his observation of the houses, juxtaposing a road as good as that *anywhere* with a natural force that leaves its traces *everywhere*. Remnants of bridges and felled trees are “strewn along the road” in a display of nature’s stern power—and while this is not the uninhabitable nature that Thoreau will later confront on Katahdin, it is a precursor that reveals how inhospitable, if not uninhabitable, the Maine wilderness can be.

Indeed, even in the settled town of Enfield, where the travelers stop for the night, Thoreau at first perceives little difference between the town and the woods that surround it:

This, like most localities bearing names on this road, was a place to name which, in the midst of the unnamed and unincorporated wilderness, was to make a distinction without a difference, it seemed to me. Here, however, I noticed quite

an orchard of healthy and well-grown apple-trees, in a bearing state, it being the oldest settler's house in this region, but all natural fruit and comparatively worthless for want of a grafter. (8)

The acts of marking off land and naming it, those initial steps of possession and ownership, have no real impact on the inhabitants' control over this parcel of land. The town remains undifferentiated from the wilderness in which it is situated, except for the presence of the healthy, fruit-bearing orchard of apple trees. Significantly, though, this apparent cultivation of nature remains *uncultivated*, unharvested, "natural." Despite being a part of the oldest settler's land, the orchard remains unsettled, so to speak, for it remains disconnected from human use.

Thoreau continues to cast the settlements along the Houlton Road in natural terms, and in doing so, his description of the road locates it as a middle ground between the pure civilization of Bangor and the pure wilderness of Katahdin:

There were very few houses along the road, yet they did not altogether fail, as if the law by which men are dispersed over the globe were a very stringent one, and not to be resisted with impunity or for slight reasons. There were even the germs of one or two villages just beginning to expand. The beauty of the road itself was remarkable. The various evergreens, many of which are rare with us,—delicate and beautiful specimens of the larch, arbor-vitae, ball-spruce, and fir-balsalm, from a few inches to many feet in height,—lined its sides, in some places like a long, front yard, springing up from the smooth grass-plots which uninterruptedly border it, and are made fertile by its wash; while it was but a step on either hand to the grim, untrodden wilderness, whose tangled labyrinth of living, fallen, and decaying trees only the deer and moose, the bear and wolf can easily penetrate. More perfect specimens than any front-yard plot can show grew there to grace the passage of the Houlton teams. (12)

Although the picture Thoreau gives us here is of a land just on the cusp of being sparsely settled, his focus is less on the settlements themselves than on their natural environs.

Even the act of settling the land is figured not as an act of human will but as the realization of a higher natural law, for in Thoreau's formulation men are "dispersed over

the globe” like seeds and result in the “germs” of villages. If Thoreau does not describe for us the actual homes, he does transform the road itself into a kind of home for the traveler. It is lined by a “long, front yard” of various evergreens, “delicate and beautiful specimens” that “spring” from the “smooth grass-plots.” John R. Knott suggests that Thoreau “seems to have been able to celebrate the wild character of the country more readily because he could understand it in the context of an expanding and encroaching civilization” (63).¹⁶ But despite the pastoral images evoked here, this cultivated lawn is not so much a man-made encroachment as it is the spontaneous product of damp, fertile nature. Thoreau works to naturalize these germs of villages, rooting them in the natural rather than the social world.

While Thoreau effaces the dividing lines between pastoral nature and human settlements in this passage, he maintains the “wilderness” as a separate, identifiable category. Juxtaposed against the pleasant pastoralism of the roadside is the “tangled labyrinth” of the “grim, untrodden wilderness” that lies “but a step” beyond its borders. At this point in the narrative, then, Thoreau still represents the wilderness (but not all nature) as alien to him: it is a grim space only to be penetrated by its proper animal residents.

Aside from various practical remarks about the public houses he passes along the road, Thoreau records but does not comment extensively upon these “germs” of settlement. Thoreau’s interest in domestic spaces within the Maine wilderness is heightened once the party abandons the established roads for backwoods trails. Foremost

¹⁶ Knott contends that “Chesuncook” and “The Allegash and East Branch” reveal Thoreau to be “more comfortable with the Maine wilderness, though not at home in it” (67). As I suggest, however, “Ktaadn” itself contains moments where Thoreau imagines himself at home in the Maine woods.

among these spaces are the abandoned loggers' camps and the farmhouses of the two white settlers who eventually become Thoreau's guides, George McCauslin and Thomas Fowler. Thoreau describes each of these backwoods homes in great detail. Despite their "drear" surroundings, the loggers' camps embody for Thoreau man's successful inhabitation of the wilderness. Echoing his description of the abandoned woodsman's hut in "A Winter Walk," Thoreau writes: "They are very proper forest houses, the stems of the trees collected together and piled up around a man to keep out wind and rain, —made of living green logs, hanging with moss and lichen, and with the curls and fringes of the yellow-birch bark, and dripping with resin, fresh and moist, and redolent of swampy odors, with that sort of vigor and perennialness even about them that toadstools suggest" (24).¹⁷ Thoreau's description here recalls two earlier passages of "Ktaadn." First, in sharp contrast to Thoreau's critique of the excesses of the lumber industry and its transformation of the white pine into a friction match (4), this passage celebrates the loggers' use of their natural surroundings. Though these are houses, they are *forest* houses—and they retain the primitive vigor inherent in their natural sources. Where the lumber companies have degraded the white pine by transforming it into a match, the lumbermen, in Thoreau's eyes, have put these trees to a proper use. Second, this picture of the loggers' camp recalls Thoreau's previous description of the wilderness along the Houlton Road: moist, tangled, and fertile, these houses are not the impenetrable domain of the wolf and bear but the very residence of the lumbermen. Thoreau thus begins to revise those earlier impressions, a shift in perspective—Thoreau's apparent "naturalization"—that reaches its climax at the farms of McCauslin and Fowler.

¹⁷ There are other echoes of the earlier essay here, too—most notably that the camp's only lookout is "to the sky overhead" (24).

Although situated in an “extensive clearing,” McCauslin’s farm is “bounded abruptly, on all sides but the river, by the naked stems of the forest” (27). Isolated in the midst of a vast tract of wilderness, McCauslin’s farm nevertheless stands as an ideal example of a life lived close to nature. Rather than being home to a Spartan way of life, the farm is actually marked by abundance, the products of McCauslin’s industry. After detailing the extensive supper McCauslin provided them, Thoreau summarizes, “Everything here was in profusion, and the best of its kind” (29). Much like the loggers’ camps, McCauslin’s farmhouse harnesses nature without being unnatural: “There were no sawed boards, or shingles, or clapboards, about it; and scarcely any tool but the axe had been used in its construction,” Thoreau notes (32). Thoreau obviously admires the craft behind McCauslin’s house, but that admiration also arises from Thoreau’s recognition that McCauslin has built this home without advanced tools. That is, it approaches natural status even though it is man-made.

Located four miles down an “obscure trail . . . which even the woodman is sometimes puzzled to discern” (34), Fowler’s house, like McCauslin’s farm, also exists on this borderland between wilderness and civilization. Calling attention to the faint trail connecting the two homesteads, Thoreau underscores his further movement away from civilization and toward wilderness. He also subtly suggests his growing expertise in the woods: even experienced lumbermen occasionally lose this trail, but Thoreau and his party successfully navigate their way to Fowler’s clearing. Much like the other “forest houses” that Thoreau describes, Fowler’s house also is constructed in harmony with its natural surroundings: it is papered with the bark of a spruce turned inside-out, which Thoreau says is “in keeping with the circumstances” (35). Furthermore, Thoreau draws a

link between Fowler's house and a nearby eagle's nest to emphasize its naturalness.

"There were these two houses only there" (36), Thoreau notes, suggesting that Fowler is as ideal a representation of inhabiting nature as is the eagle.

In addition to serving such symbolic ends, Fowler's house is also the scene of Thoreau's first unreserved communion with the Maine woods. Drinking with his companions a draught of beer that is "clear and thin, but strong and stringent as the cedar sap," Thoreau remarks:

It was as if we sucked at the very teats of Nature's pine-clad bosom in these parts, —the sap of all Millinocket botany commingled, —the topmost, most fantastic, and spiciest of sprays of the primitive wood, and whatever invigorating and stringent gum or essence it afforded steeped and dissolved in it, —a lumberer's drink, which would acclimate and naturalize a man at once, —which would make him see green, and if he slept, dream that he heard the wind sough among the pines. (35)

This passage is somewhat similar to the noteworthy "Contact!" passage that serves as the climax of "Ktaadn" (which I will discuss below). Here, too, Thoreau's syntax becomes broken, and he shifts from the first-person "we" to the third-person "he." The syntactical breakdown, however, is not an indication of Thoreau's alienation from nature, as it will be on the slopes of Katahdin, but a sign of his ecstatic connectedness to nature, the brief, interjected phrases mimicking the excitement of the moment. Thoreau figures his relationship to nature as a nurturing, motherly one that depends upon viewing the natural world as a beneficent force—precisely the kind of metaphor of an embracing, feminine landscape that Annette Kolodny calls attention to in *The Lay of the Land*. The immediate transformation that this "naturalizing" drink effects is also noteworthy, for it reinforces

the positive sense of nature here: as in the passage from “The Allegash and East Branch” with which I began this chapter, here too the individual’s relation to nature is changed “at once.”

Thoreau’s “acclimation” to his Maine surroundings culminates with an apparent shift in his figuration of the wilderness and in his relationship to it—he begins, in effect, to “see green.” Although Fink rightly points out that Thoreau’s “rather graphic description of the loss of eighteen of the Fowlers’ sheep to wolves” becomes the final “omen of departure into the wilderness” (170), that image does not entirely undercut Thoreau’s sense of harmony with nature. Indeed, no longer simply the “grim” or “drear” labyrinth that Thoreau describes earlier as being impenetrable by humans, the wilderness becomes now a “pleasant” one that he is “eager to become acquainted with” (39). Furthermore, whereas Thoreau has been celebrating the naturalness of the human habitations he encounters, he now writes a human presence into this otherwise “uninhabited” natural world. For example, Thoreau writes of his nighttime experience on North Twin Lake: “No face welcomed us but the fine fantastic sprays of free and happy evergreen trees, waving one above another in their ancient home. At first the red clouds hung over the western shore as gorgeously as if over a city, and the lake lay open to the light with even a civilized aspect, as if expecting trade and commerce, and towns and villas” (46–47). While this passage begins by asserting the absence of human intervention in this entirely natural scene, it concludes by implying just such a presence, prompting David M. Robinson to claim that “The assertion of the non-human condition that Thoreau finds at the lake is undercut by the domestic metaphors that he applies to the wilderness” (213). Thoreau’s aim here, though, is not to domesticate the natural world and thus

defuse its unsettling potential. Rather, he establishes a firmer connection between himself and this pristine wilderness and undermines the either/or distinction between nature and civilization. In personifying the evergreens, Thoreau constructs this natural scene, devoid though it is of settlement, as an inviting space.

Nowhere is this desire to erase the divide between forest and city clearer than in the extended account that Thoreau includes for his reader “in order to convey some idea of a night in the woods” (53). Awakened in the middle of the night, Thoreau takes a brief stroll along the lakeshore where he and his companions are camped. He elaborates on his impressions:

Thus aroused, I, too, brought fresh fuel to the fire, and then rambled along the sandy shore in the moonlight, hoping to meet a moose come down to drink, or else a wolf. The little rill tinkled the louder, and peopled all the wilderness for me; and the glassy smoothness of the sleeping lake, laving the shores of a new world, with the dark, fantastic rocks rising here and there from its surface, made a scene not easily described. It has left such an impression of stern, yet gentle, wildness on my memory as will not soon be effaced. (52–53)

Thoreau’s expectation to meet a wild animal on his walk is replaced by the sensation that this wilderness is “peopled,” a shift in terms that conjoins human and nonhuman and that implies Thoreau’s society has become the natural world itself rather than his human companions, and he hopes to meet one of the wild inhabitants of the woods. This nighttime scene, Thoreau admits, is a memorable if “not easily described” one—partly because of its sublime beauty but also because it collapses the distinctions between civilization and nature that Thoreau has been exploring throughout his journey. Further, the combination of the smooth lake and the fantastic rocks suggests a “stern, yet gentle wildness,” a synthesis Thoreau has heretofore not articulated. Although the passage describing the scene along the Houlton Road places similar natural features together, they

remain distinct from one another: the roadside grass-plots are gentle and delicate, while the wilderness lurking just a step beyond them remains tangled and grim. Here, however, Thoreau intermingles the two sets of terms to an extent not previously seen. The Maine wilderness has become “pleasant” and “gentle” as well as “stern” and “fantastic.”

This communion with the wilderness, however, does not mark the climax of Thoreau’s narrative, and so it does not stand as the final expression of the author’s emerging relationship with the natural world that he encounters in Maine. Focusing on the lyrical description of trout fishing with which Thoreau begins the fourth installment of “Ktaadn,” Fink has pointed out,

Critical discussions of “Ktaadn” have focused too exclusively on Thoreau’s disturbing confrontation with raw matter on the summit of the mountain, neglecting this complementary and crucial perception of nature’s “celestial” state. Throughout the narrative Thoreau has juxtaposed the hostile and the hospitable sides of nature, so it is not simply, as some critics have suggested, that before his ascent Thoreau indulges in a naively romantic view of nature which he is afterward unable to sustain. (175)

Likewise, failing to attend to these moments where Thoreau becomes naturalized himself—where he casts himself as being increasingly at home in the Maine wilderness—can similarly lead us to focus too exclusively on Thoreau’s “disturbing confrontation with raw matter” as a *negative* experience of nature.

Certainly, during his ascent of Mount Katahdin, Thoreau will discover the limits to his naturalization when he faces what he calls “pure Nature” (94). Having increasingly portrayed himself as a fit inhabitant of the Maine wilderness, Thoreau must confront on Katahdin’s table lands the fact that there is no such fit human inhabitant, that his concept of naturalized man must remain ideal and not real. This realization emerges as Thoreau shifts from a language that emphasizes the natural world’s familiarity to one that captures

his inescapable alienation from it; Thoreau simultaneously shifts from a vision of nature as generally benevolent to a perspective that acknowledges nature's potential inhospitableness toward man. However, the sense of alienation Thoreau experiences here is not, I would argue, a sign of his failure to connect with the natural world but rather an affirmation of that connection.

Thoreau's ascent of Katahdin begins from the group's camp on the Aboljacknagesic River, the site of the trout fishing episode that celebrates nature in its "celestial" state. Thoreau notes that their route now takes them over land that their guides had never explored before, "and there was not the slightest trace of man to guide us farther in this direction" (74). As a result, Thoreau and his companions must rely on their own route-finding skills, and Thoreau calls attention to his assumption of a leadership role: "Here it fell to my lot, as the oldest mountain-climber, to take the lead" (74). On the one hand, Thoreau's dismissive beginning to this sentence diminishes his role—it merely fell to his lot to guide his companions up the mountain. On the other hand, though, Thoreau quietly asserts his expertise: he has climbed mountains previously,¹⁸ and he confidently leads his reader through a description of his chosen route, which he determines by scanning the mountain's ridges from a distance. Thoreau's climb thus begins by underscoring his ability to read and understand the wilderness before him.

Even as Thoreau calls attention to his expertise, he also emphasizes the party's increasing immersion in nature during their approach to Katahdin. After all, there is "not the slightest trace" of other humans here, suggesting that the party is moving ever closer

¹⁸ Thoreau climbed Mount Washington in New Hampshire's White Mountains in 1839. At 6,288 feet in elevation, Washington is a taller mountain than Katahdin, and as such it would have prepared Thoreau for the climb of Katahdin. As Don Scheese points out, Thoreau had also climbed other "lesser" mountains, such as Mounts Greylock and Monadnock (55).

to a state of pure nature. Having set their compass bearing, Thoreau notes that “we were soon buried in the woods” (75). Immediately, too, the evidence of human inhabitants is replaced by the presence of animals: “We soon began to meet with traces of bears and moose, and those of rabbits were everywhere visible. The tracks of moose, more or less recent, to speak literally, covered every square rod on the sides of this mountain” (75–76). The overwhelming number of animal tracks and the sense of being “buried” in the woods (Thoreau repeats this phrase at a later point in their ascent [79]) initially dwarf Thoreau and his companions in comparison to the vastness of nature. Thoreau’s first ascent of the upper slopes of Katahdin, attempted while his companions search for a suitable campsite, reveals precisely this sense of the magnitude of his surroundings. As Fink points out, “Here and throughout the ascent Thoreau’s imagery emphasizes his own insignificance, and he seems to exploit all the conventions of the romantic sublime as he expresses his awe and terror in the face of the mountain’s vastness” (176). But this passage is also marked by the *heroic* dimensions of Thoreau’s struggle, and even as he describes the magnitude of the mountain here, Thoreau also implicitly asserts the magnitude of his own effort:

Following up the course of the torrent which occupied this [ravine], —and I mean to lay some emphasis on this word *up*, —pulling myself up by the side of perpendicular falls of twenty or thirty feet, by roots of firs and birches, and then, perhaps, walking a level rod or two in the thin stream, for it took up the whole road, ascending by huge steps, as it were, a giant’s stairway, down which a river flowed, I had soon cleared the trees, and paused on successive shelves, to look back over the country. . . . Leaving this at last, I began to work my way, scarcely less arduous than Satan’s anciently through Chaos, up the nearest, though not the highest peak. At first scrambling on all fours over the tops of ancient black spruce-trees. . . . This was the sort of garden I made my way *over* ... not seeing any path *through* it,—certainly the most treacherous and porous country I ever traveled. (80–81)

Thoreau's allusion to Milton's Satan ascending through Chaos underscores not only the epic scale of nature but also the epic scale of his own climb. While we can certainly read this passage as articulating Thoreau's sense of his own insignificance, it also relentlessly asserts his sense of accomplishment: "pulling myself up by the side of perpendicular falls of twenty or thirty feet . . . ascending by huge steps . . . scrambling on all fours."

Thoreau's language thus celebrates the relative success of his evening climb. Indeed, it can be seen in some ways as an extension of Thoreau's naturalization, as he becomes animal-like in scrambling up the ridge on his hands and feet. Massive though Katahdin is, Thoreau is nevertheless able to navigate his way up the mountain here—if not through it, as he points out, then over it.

Thoreau's evening climb, however, also hints at the limits of his naturalization, the limits of his ability to connect in perfect harmony with the mountain. His ironic use of "garden" to describe terrain that more aptly fits into the category of "tangled labyrinth" and his use of "road" to describe the steep "torrent" by which he ascends the ridge expose the disjuncture between Thoreau's experience and the language he uses to describe it. Thoreau's emerging alienation from this landscape is further suggested as he climbs through this tangle to arrive at a mock pastoral scene, "where rocks, gray, silent rocks, were the flocks and herds that pastured, chewing a rocky cud at the sunset. They looked at me with hard gray eyes, without a bleat or a low" (82). The natural world has fallen silent to Thoreau, only observing him with "hard gray eyes" that reassert the developing distance between Thoreau and his natural surroundings.

While Thoreau's evening climb reveals the mountain to be unresponsive to human presence, his second attempt to reach the summit demonstrates nature's active

hostility. As we have seen, Thoreau began his trip to Katahdin by visiting one factory, and his ascent culminates in a visit to an entirely different kind of factory. The next morning, Thoreau resumes his summit bid, and once again Thoreau's mountain climbing expertise enables him to rapidly distance himself from his companions. Having reached a ridgeline beneath the highest summit of Katahdin, Thoreau becomes immersed "deep within the hostile ranks of clouds, and all objects were obscured by them" (84). "It was like sitting in a chimney and waiting for the smoke to blow away. It was, in fact," he continues, "a cloud factory, —and these were the cloud-works. . . . Occasionally, when the windy columns broke into me, I caught sight of a dark, damp crag to the right or left; the mist driving ceaselessly between it and me" (85). Thoreau's language here casts nature as a violent, malevolent force, and he underscores the gap between himself and nature. Importantly, he likens his experience to sitting in a chimney: what has previously figured as an image of the fundamental link between the individual and nature now becomes the sign of that link's limits.

Whereas the bateau factory signifies a "mongrel" life fusing the natural to the civilized, the cloud factory signals the exact opposite—Thoreau's approach toward but ultimate failure to achieve a transcendent link between himself and the natural world, for all objects remain obscured to his perception as the ceaseless mist allows only for glimpses of his surroundings. Rather than gaining the clear vision of the country that such a mountain prospect often affords, Thoreau finds his sight limited. More bewildered than naturalized by this experience, Thoreau figures nature as an aggressive stepmother who attacks such "daring and insolent men":

It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits. Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends. He is more alone than you can imagine. There is less of substantial thought and fair understanding in him than in the plains where men inhabit. His reason is dispersed and shadowy, more thin and subtle, like the air. Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got him at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. (85–86)

Thoreau's shift from first-person to third-person here echoes the shift that occurred at Fowler's farm as Thoreau sucked at the "teats of Nature's pine-clad bosom," but instead of nurturing the self through an ecstatic communion, nature threatens its bodily and spiritual integrity. Thoreau's "divine" sense escapes through a body that can no longer entirely contain it, and his conception of the individual's relation to nature is thrown into question because he has entered a place "such as man never inhabits." Although he may possess a certain wilderness expertise, and though he may feel a kindred connection to nature, Thoreau is forced to acknowledge that his naturalization does not equal complete harmony with the natural world.

This realization is confirmed as Thoreau and his companions descend from Katahdin's higher elevations. In passing over the "Burnt Lands," Thoreau writes that "I found myself traversing them familiarly, like some pasture run to waste, or partially reclaimed by man" (93). The naturalized Thoreau treats this landscape as if it were familiar, initially reading it in terms of a human-imposed landscape (the pasture); as he admits, "It is difficult to conceive of a region uninhabited by man. We habitually presume his presence and influence everywhere" (94). Despite the alienation from nature he experienced in the "cloud factory," Thoreau continues to cast the landscape in terms that render it familiar. His experiences on Katahdin expose the flaws behind that presumption

and reveal the boundaries of his naturalization, for he is faced with a nature with which he cannot completely identify:

Nature was here something savage and awful, though beautiful. . . . Here was no man's garden, but the unhandseled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor waste land. . . . Man was not to be associated with it. It was Matter, vast, terrific, —not his Mother Earth that we have heard of, not for him to tread on, or be buried in, —no, it were being too familiar even to let his bones lie there, —the home, this, of Necessity and Fate. There was clearly felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man. (94)

If Thoreau has previously written the wilderness as a surrogate home for naturalized man, here that tactic fails him. Humans are “not to be associated with” this “forever untameable” landscape, as it becomes “the home” not of man but of natural forces far beyond the control of man. Unlike the passage about North Twin Lake, where Thoreau figures himself as a welcome guest greeted by trees in their home, here he acknowledges his status as an intruder. Although Thoreau has previously recognized the wilderness as “stern” and “grim,” such a characterization was never explicitly antagonistic to man. In the Burnt Lands, however, Thoreau continues the image of nature he began crafting in response to Katahdin's cloud factory. Feeling possessed by a Titanic force of nature that overwhelms and disorients him, Thoreau extends his alienation from nature to a more fundamental alienation from himself: “Think of our life in nature, —daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it,—rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense*! *Contact! Contact! Who are we? where are we?*” (95). Having “peopled the wilderness” and celebrated his nighttime communion with the wilderness, Thoreau must here acknowledge the limits of that communion.¹⁹ “Our life in

¹⁹ Critics have interpreted Thoreau's response to the Burnt Lands quite differently. Bridgman, for example, sees this passage as expressing Thoreau's desire for a tamed nature, one domesticated to man's use. “Although Thoreau enjoyed nature,” Bridgman contends, “it was the controlled and domesticated nature of

nature,” as Thoreau’s experiences in the Maine woods reveal, is comprised of both an intense contact with nature and an inescapable separation from it. While his adoption of the furred life enables his closer, more intimate contact with nature, that contact is always partial and incomplete—such that nature can be equally home and not home, familiar as well as alien. The “*Contact!*” passage, then, is an early articulation of the point Thoreau will make much more emphatically in “Walking”: that much of nature’s value inheres in parts of it remaining unsubdued by man.

In writing about the original published format of “Ktaadn” in the *Union Magazine*, Henry Golemba claims that the magazine “did its utmost to domesticate Thoreau’s text” (72) by publishing it alongside “manifold representations of civilization” (74). Noting that the fourth installment of “Ktaadn” was accompanied by an engraving by P. Loomis that depicted hikers pausing for rest in the woods, Golemba contends that the image “actually contradicts [Thoreau’s] theme” of the chaos of nature. Moreover, the remaining contents of the magazine issues—essays on sightseeing in Europe, poems with images of sobbing angels—further “control the wildness and alienation of ‘Ktaadn’” (74). Golemba suggests that Caroline Kirkland, the editor of the *Union Magazine* at the time, had an (unconscious) desire to domesticate Thoreau’s text, largely owing to her experiences in Michigan—most of which he claims were “repugnant to a civilized New England settler” (74). But his assertion about Kirkland’s motives appears to rest on an assumption about those experiences rather than on an analysis of Kirkland’s

Concord and its environs” (201). Thoreau “could not face” “the full alienness of nature” (202), and thus “Ktaadn” must be understood as articulating “generally disconcerting experiences” (204). McIntosh, by contrast, contends that Thoreau anticipates the “otherness” of nature (191) and views it as “fundamentally life-giving and health-restoring”: “To treat *Contact! Contact!* as the anagnorisis in a tragedy of which Thoreau is the disillusioned protagonist is to be false to the spirit and style of his nature writing” (207). My own interpretation, it should be evident, aligns more closely with those like McIntosh’s than with those like Bridgman’s.

representations of them in *A New Home*. Indeed, although Thoreau certainly offers a more radical vision in championing the wilderness as home, Kirkland, as I showed in chapter 1, was similarly insistent on linking home and nature. And for her, that link was not simply based on a desire to domesticate or order her natural surroundings but rested on her obvious appreciation of the “deep” and “tangled” woods as well (*A New Home* 191). Moreover, Golemba’s accusations are complicated by the fact that Bayard Taylor was acting as editor of the *Union Magazine* when “Ktaadn” was published, making it difficult if not impossible to attribute particular editorial decisions to Kirkland alone. As much as Golemba accuses the *Union Magazine* of domesticating Thoreau’s account, so might he be accused of placing too much emphasis on its wildness at the expense of its domestic moments.²⁰ The juxtaposition of the “civilized” images and Thoreau’s “wild” text might actually be read as capturing Thoreau’s point about the fundamental links between home and wilderness. Indeed, as Thoreau’s “Ktaadn” narrative demonstrates, the Maine wilderness is neither wholly domestic nor wholly wild, and the individual’s relationship to nature is thus an ongoing negotiation between the familiar and the alien.

Thoreau concludes “Ktaadn” with precisely such a balance between his polar experiences of nature, as he acknowledges his multiple responses to Maine. Though his climactic experience on Katahdin confirms that “there are parts of nature that remain beyond human comprehension” (Scheese 56), in his conclusion Thoreau transforms that knowledge from a sign of human limitation into a sign of human and national potential. That potential relies on the wilderness’s dual characteristics: “universally stern and savage” but also “mild and civilizing in a degree” (107), the Maine woods can serve as a

²⁰ See Fink (186–87) for more on Thoreau’s reaction to the *Union Magazine*’s editorial choices with regard to “Ktaadn.”

model not just for geographical exploration but for the ongoing exploration of the link between individuals and “the inexpressible tenderness and immortal life of the grim forest” (108–109). In many ways, Thoreau epitomizes Gary Snyder’s contention that nature is home, and that within that home there simply are more familiar and less familiar places. Indeed, in his conclusion to “Ktaadn,” Thoreau reasserts his view of the natural world as home, extending that label to the wilderness as well: “What a place to live,” he exclaims about the Maine woods, “what a place to die and be buried in!” (109). Thoreau thus transforms his earlier sense of being “buried” in the woods into a celebration of the fundamental link between the individual and nature. In this way, “Ktaadn” serves as an extreme counterpart to the extreme statement of “A Winter Walk”: whereas the earlier essay writes pastoral nature into the farmstead, the later work insists that the wilderness—grim, savage, and inhospitable though it may occasionally be—can also be a home for the individual. Taken together, these essays might re-frame our understanding of *Walden* as well, situating it as the middle landscape of three works that redefine the poles of wilderness and home as radically coexisting along the entire spectrum of environments. That is, what these “extreme statements” ultimately reveal is not simply Thoreau’s “border life” but, more importantly, the border life of the wilderness/home distinction itself.

The “Editorial Miscellany” of the July 1848 issue of the *Union Magazine* situated “Ktaadn” in the context of the widening scope of domestic leisure travel. In a way, then, the *Union* editors did “domesticate” Thoreau’s narrative—certainly not in the ways Golemba alleges—by linking Maine with other American destinations. Both Caroline Kirkland and Bayard Taylor were deeply interested in fostering both the expansion of

travel and the publication of texts about that travel, and while it is unclear whether Kirkland or Taylor was responsible for writing the July “Miscellany,”²¹ it expresses an excitement about domestic travel that both authors clearly endorsed. Importantly, the travel that the “Miscellany” imagines is specifically focused on destinations in the American wilderness:

The horizon, which bounds the summer wanderings of the fashionables, during their two months’ release from the close air and dust and din of cities, has been greatly widened within a year or two. The old watering places, outside of which all journeying was formerly unfashionable, still retain their prerogative of name, but share the preference of the flitting community with newer and more remote points of attraction. The fresh and exciting resources of travel are only beginning to be developed in our country. Much of our finest mountain and lake scenery is still almost entirely unknown, and that which lay but yesterday far beyond the borders of civilization, is now reachable by steamboat and locomotive. The magnificent mountain scenery of the Adirondac region . . . is still sufficiently rare to be tempting to young adventurers. The Alpine district of Maine, equal in startling grandeur, and unpruned, primitive beauties, to the famed Norwegian mountains, rarely sees other visitors than the Penobscot lumber-men. An account of this sublime wilderness is in our possession, the commencement of which will be found in this number of the Magazine.

Even without waiting for the construction of Whitney’s rail-road, the Rocky Mountains will be another summer resort, ten years hence. A month’s residence in the “South Park,” with an ascent of Long’s Peak, will then be a complete substitute for Mont Blanc and the Vale of Chamouni, and thus draw poets and tourists over the ocean of the prairies, instead of the Atlantic. . . . Away then to the far north, and north-east, and north-west, ye languid citizens! There is nothing like the breeze of the wilderness for pale cheeks and feeble limbs. (46)

²¹ At the time the June issue of the magazine was being prepared, Kirkland was preparing for a European tour. Taylor acted as editor until she returned in October, but his acting editorship was a collaborative effort. In an April 6, 1848, letter to Taylor regarding the June issue of the magazine, Kirkland writes, “If I don’t accomplish it, will you write something as foolish and feminine as you can—that it may pass for mine” (Roberts 171). Since the first installment of Kirkland’s travel piece “Sightseeing in Europe” appeared in the July issue of the *Union* along with Thoreau’s “Ktaadn,” it is possible that she also played some role in writing the “Editorial Miscellany” for that issue. Kirkland’s piece is credited as being “by the editor,” so the *Union* issue implies her continuing editorial influence. But given some of its rhetoric, and particularly its celebration of Colorado’s Rocky Mountains as an emerging “summer resort,” the “Miscellany” was quite likely written by Taylor. Compare the language here with Taylor’s language in *Colorado*, which I discuss in the next chapter. Moreover, Kirkland granted Taylor the “liberty to change or add to” her installment of “Sight-seeing” (Roberts 172), so it is reasonable that she would grant him similar freedoms in writing the “Editorial Miscellany.”

Noting that “Ktaadn” captures the “sublime wilderness” of Maine and casting it as a sign that “[t]he fresh and exciting resources of travel are only beginning to be developed in our country,” the “Miscellany” culminates with a clear exhortation of its audience to enjoy the “wilderness.” That call has nationalist implications, too, echoing Kirkland’s assertion in *A New Home* that these lands “deserve a poet of their own” (35). Not only does the “Miscellany” place the Maine woods alongside “the famed Norwegian mountains” and figure Longs Peak as a “substitute” for Mont Blanc, but it also suggests that it is the duty of American “citizens” to further develop these resources of travel. That is, we must turn our attention from “old watering places” to new attractions, a call for exploration similar to that with which Thoreau closes “Ktaadn.”

Even as he celebrated the untamed nature he encountered through his travels in Maine, Thoreau also took care to note practical details “for the benefit of future tourists” (60). I turn to two such future tourists in the next chapter, as I juxtapose George William Curtis’s *Lotus-Eating*, an account of such old East Coast watering places as Niagara Falls and Saratoga, with Bayard Taylor’s *Colorado*, an account of his tour of the Rocky Mountains, precisely that region the “Miscellany” predicts “will be another summer resort, ten years hence.” Like Irving, Kirkland, and Thoreau, these authors are fundamentally concerned with the links between nature and home, and in chapter 3 I explore how their responses to the nascent development of a national tourist industry affect their conception of the boundaries between wilderness and home and how their conception of those boundaries subsequently informs their brands of literary nationalism.

CHAPTER 3

“WHAT SWITZERLAND IS TO EUROPE”: NATIONALISM, TOURISM, AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL SUBLIME IN GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS AND BAYARD TAYLOR

Henry David Thoreau closes “Ktaadn” by contending that we “have discovered only the shores of America” (109) and asserting that the vast interior of the continent remains to be explored. For Thoreau, this wilderness within the nation’s borders signifies an individual and national potential that has yet to be realized—an early formulation of his later admonition, in the conclusion of *Walden*, to “explore your own higher latitudes. . . . Nay, be a Columbus to whole new continents and worlds within you, opening new channels, not of trade, but of thought” (560). In “Ktaadn,” as we have seen, Thoreau focuses on a Maine wilderness that remains relatively untouched by the expansion of the United States, arguing that individuals should naturalize themselves so that they feel at home in such wild environs. His emphasis, then, is not so much the domestication of nature as it is the naturalization of the domestic.

In contrast to Thoreau’s work, the accounts of stateside travel by George William Curtis and Bayard Taylor focus on the increasing ways in which the natural world is becoming transformed into a homelike space for the enjoyment of American tourists. Indeed, whereas Thoreau’s trip to Katahdin is set against “the tide of fashionable travel” (2), the trips Curtis and Taylor recount in the texts studied here are precisely part of that tide. Writing of northeastern U.S. tourist resorts and of the emerging natural playground

of the Colorado Rockies, respectively, Curtis and Taylor each articulate a central concern with the developing tourist infrastructure of the nation. Through their portrayal of the intersections between the American wilderness and human development of that wilderness, Curtis's *Lotus-Eating: A Summer Book* (1852) and Taylor's *Colorado: A Summer Trip* (1867) reveal the role recreational travel can play in constituting national identity. For Curtis and Taylor, both of whom traveled through Europe and Asia as young men,¹ the American scene cannot escape comparison to those previously visited lands—but their attitudes about how those lands compare differ greatly. While both authors employ what Leo Marx describes as the “rhetoric of the technological sublime” (195), their conceptions of American progress are tempered by their differing relationships to Europe. In this chapter, then, I examine Curtis's and Taylor's works in tandem to underscore the distinctions between the authors' representations of American tourism and its implications. In *Lotus-Eating*, Curtis suggests that the American landscape he surveys is merely a reminder of the grandeur of Europe, a sign of America's continuing inconsequence in the face of the Old World.² In *Colorado*, by contrast, Taylor works against such a dismissive view, as he insists on the promise that territory holds not only for itself but also for the United States as a whole in the wake of the Civil War.

¹ At the age of 22, George William Curtis left New York for Europe in August 1846; during the winter of 1849, Curtis accompanied his friend Quincy Shaw on a trip through Egypt to Jerusalem and Syria, a journey that provided the material for Curtis's first two books. He returned to the United States in 1850 and never traveled abroad again.

Bayard Taylor traveled through Europe during 1844–1846, a journey that resulted in the publication of *Views A-Foot*, and through the Near and Far East from 1851–1853. For more on Curtis's travels abroad, see Milne, chapter 4; for more on Taylor's other travels, see Wermuth, chapter 2.

² Curtis's title is a reference both to Homer's *Odyssey* and to Alfred, Lord Tennyson's “The Lotos-Eaters,” an 1832 poem. Based on an episode from the Greek epic, Tennyson's poem expresses a weariness with travel, concluding with the line “O, rest ye, brother mariners, we will not wander more” (l. 173).

In *The Machine in the Garden*, Marx describes “the rhetoric of the technological sublime,” a concept that is particularly useful in considering the development of tourist infrastructure around natural wonders—a development that figures prominently in both *Lotus-Eating* and *Colorado*. According to Marx, beginning in the 1830s, American symbols of technological development (in particular, the railroad) become “invested with political and metaphysical ideality” (206), signs of “the sublime progress of the human race” (197). The newly mechanized landscape of nineteenth-century United States embodies an ideal and “unprecedented harmony between art and nature, city and country” (195), all effected by the exertion of human will over the natural environment. In the mid-1800s, then, American culture became saturated with this rhetoric, and the technological improvement of nature became a sign of American exceptionalism. “There is a special affinity between the machine and the new Republic,” Marx writes. “In the first place, the raw landscape is an ideal setting for technological progress” (203). Marx continues:

To account for the progress of American technology it is not enough to talk about geography, or even the combined effect of the virgin land and Yankee inventive skill. One must also recognize the incentives which call forth that skill. They are provided by a democracy which invites every man to enhance his own comfort and status. To the citizen of a democracy inventions are vehicles for the pursuit of happiness. (204–205)

The technological sublime is thus vitally connected to the U.S.’s capitalist democracy, and this fusion of nature, commerce, and nationalism is perhaps expressed most clearly in the transformation of the American landscape into an American resort. In their travel

accounts, Curtis and Taylor capture precisely that transformation, and they use this “tide of fashionable travel” as a vehicle for their larger arguments about the interconnections between home, nature, and nation.

“Nothing so grand and accessible”:
Curtis’s *Lotus-Eating: A Summer Book*

“None more than Americans make it a principle to desert the city, and none less than Americans know how to dispense with it,” George William Curtis writes at the outset of *Lotus-Eating*, his third book. “So we compromise by taking the city with us,” he continues, “and the country gently laughs us to scorn” (12–13). Separated into eleven sketches about a number of tourist attractions of the northeastern United States, Curtis’s account of his 1851 summer tour examines that “compromised” space between city and country.³ Preceded in Curtis’s oeuvre by *Nile Notes of a Howadji* (1851) and *A Howadji in Syria* (1852) and followed by his better-known *Potiphar Papers* (1853) and *Prue and I* (1856), *Lotus-Eating* has attracted very little critical attention.⁴ Indeed, Curtis’s work as a whole has garnered scant sustained interest. *Lotus-Eating*, however, rewards close attention, for it is at once an exploration of the boundaries between home and wilderness within the United States and a meditation on the relationship between the landscapes of America and Europe. Understood in the context of the works by Irving, Kirkland, and Thoreau that I have already discussed, and juxtaposed in this chapter against Bayard

³ The pieces first appeared as letters to the *Tribune*, and Curtis inscribed the book collection to the editor Charles A. Dana, whom Curtis had met at Brook Farm in 1842 and with whom Curtis would work on the newspaper.

⁴ Contemporary criticism of *Lotus-Eating* is nearly non-existent. Even at the turn of the twentieth century, when Curtis was perhaps a better remembered literary figure, critics tended to dismiss *Lotus-Eating* in favor of the author’s other works. Leon Vincent, for example, calls the book “a series of journalistic letters” that “abounds in happy characterizations” (429), and Edward Cary contends that although “there is much still to enjoy” in the book’s account, “the little volume was essentially ephemeral, in form and purpose” (76).

Taylor's *Colorado*, Curtis's *Lotus-Eating* emerges as a text unique in its longing for a lost connection to Europe. Moreover, given Curtis's focus throughout the book on the development of popular tourist sites, *Lotus-Eating* provides a distinct vision of the emergence of nature as a recreational commodity and the transformation of the wilderness into a surrogate home for the traveler. Even as Curtis records that transformation in *Lotus-Eating*, however, he remains alienated from the American scene he tours, primarily because it fails to match his earlier experiences of Europe. Unlike Irving's *A Tour on the Prairies*, which ultimately asserts a reconnection with the United States, and unlike Kirkland's *A New Home* and Thoreau's essays, which assert the fundamental connections between home and nature, Curtis's *Lotus-Eating* affirms his continued imaginative and psychological tie to Europe and conveys his disconnection from the very resorts he visits.

Curtis opens *Lotus-Eating* with a letter entitled "The Hudson and the Rhine," a comparative piece that sets the tone for the remainder of the volume. Echoing the admiration for Europe with which Irving opens *The Sketch Book*, Curtis praises the Rhine as the source of "romantic association and suggestion" that is "only possible in an old and storied country" (21).⁵ In contrast to the Rhine's "lyrical" qualities, the Hudson, Curtis contends, is "epical": "The Hudson implies a continent behind. For vineyards it has forests. For a belt of water, a majestic stream. For graceful and grain-goldened heights it has imposing mountains" (22–23). Evoking the majesty of his American home here,

⁵ Curtis's phrase closely resembles the "storied and poetical association" Irving attributes to Europe. Later in this letter, Curtis invokes *The Sketch Book* much more explicitly, noting how the Hudson's romantic associations lead him to Irving's "Rip Van Winkle." Curtis's reverie suggests that the Hudson River valley, too, is storied country. But as we will see, most of the stories and associations Curtis generates in response to this land are not about America but rather about Europe.

Curtis taps into a conventional nationalistic pride, one that finds its source in the American landscape itself. The difference between America and Europe involves distinctions between the wild and cultivated landscapes that typify each continent: American forests and imposing mountains versus European vineyards and grain-goldened heights. Although his assessment largely refrains from valuing the “epical” over the “lyrical,” the American over the European, Curtis’s neutral pose is actually undercut by his longing for what is missing from the American scene: those romantic associations he finds in the Rhine.

Indeed, while Curtis’s ostensible focus in *Lotus-Eating* remains on the “continent behind” the Hudson, the American landscape is frequently set in relief against its European counterparts. Reminiscences of his European tour pervade Curtis’s experiences during this journey around upstate New York and New England. For instance, when he misses seeing a sunrise in the Catskill Mountains of New York, Curtis can proclaim that “I did not feel as if I had seen nothing” (46); instead of the lost New York one, he gives the reader his detailed memories of “many a Swiss sunrise” (44). Similarly, Curtis punctuates his second and third chapters—about the Catskill Mountain House and Catskill Falls, respectively—not by reflecting on the immediate experience but by ruminating about Europe with his companions. Such moments are infused with melancholy and nostalgia, sentiments that resurface throughout *Lotus-Eating* and that underscore Curtis’s European yearnings. While Leon Vincent contends that Curtis’s text “abounds in happy characterizations” (429), the book is actually filled by an insistent sadness, a longing for an experience of Europe that is irretrievably gone. Curtis’s closing paragraph of “Catskill” typifies this mood: “We sat on the edge of the precipice, looking

off into the black abyss of night. Swansdowne told wild tales of crazy men in lonely nooks of Scotland, and Olde talked of Italy. They were pleasant days, he said, which shall return no more” (39). This recurring tinge of melancholy counterbalances Curtis’s much more enthusiastic portrayal of the “epical” qualities of the Hudson and the continent it implies. Curtis maneuvers back-and-forth between these sensibilities in *Lotus-Eating*, modifying his exultation at the grandeur of the American landscape with a nagging sense of its inadequacy.

That tension figures prominently in Curtis’s second letter, “Catskill,” a piece that reveals Curtis’s representation of the complex relationships between America and Europe and between home and nature. Picking up the narrative of the first letter, “Catskill” recounts the author’s journey from the shores of the Hudson into the Catskill Mountains. The first stop on Curtis’s tourist itinerary, the Catskill Mountain House is a hotel perched on a plateau at 2,800 feet that commands a view across the river valley below. Though the climb into the mountains “invigorat[es]” him, Curtis is little inspired by his destination. The view from the Mountain House provides “a fine sense of height” (35), but it is not particularly unique. “Chequered with yellow patches of ripe grain, and marked faintly with walls and fences,” the scene below resembles “rather a vast domain than a mountain-ruled landscape” (36). Surveying this landscape marked by human presence, Curtis remains unimpressed. He grants that the view is “graceful,” but he clearly wishes for a landscape “ruled” by mountains, not a “domain” lorded over by humans.

Focusing on this “want of that true mountain sublimity” (36), Curtis explains how his experience of the Catskills fails to meet his expectations, ones formed from his

previous “Alpine impressions.” Interestingly, though, Curtis transforms his original disappointment into the source for his appreciation. But it is an appreciation based on his transformation of this American natural spectacle into a European home:

[T]here is necessarily a little disappointment in the Catskill. They are hills rather than mountains. But, as they have the fame of mountains, you are recalling your Alpine impressions, all the way up. It is not very wise, perhaps, but it is *very natural* and rather unavoidable. Yet, when the night falls, the silence and coolness of *your lofty home*, impart the genuine mountain tone to your thoughts. Then you begin to acknowledge the *family* resemblance, and to remember Switzerland. (37; my emphasis)

As we have seen, Irving, Kirkland, and Thoreau all occasionally figure the natural world as home in order to assert their connection to the land and to the nation. Curtis follows that pattern, but his rhetoric of home and family is different here—for it links a kinship felt with American nature to a familiarity with European landscape. The Catskills only become a “home” for Curtis because they recall the Alps. He appreciates these New York hills, this passage suggests, primarily because they enable his imaginative reconnection not to America but to Switzerland. In this way, Curtis’s “summer trip” becomes less a visiting of places than a revisiting of memories.⁶

While Curtis ultimately figures the night-shrouded Catskills as a homelike space, the purported domestic space of the Mountain House actually becomes a wild, unnerving territory. Curtis explains that the hotel “is really unceremonious” (38), and his description of a dinner scene suggests his criticism of the hotel’s failure to match European standards; indeed, Curtis quietly targets a lack of refinement he sees as characteristically American. Noting that his companions, Olde and Swansdowne, are left with one small napkin to share, Curtis lambastes the “chambermaid” in a parenthetical aside: “(I would

⁶ The book’s title page carries the inscription, “There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance,” a sign that Curtis’s priority in *Lotus-Eating* will be remembrance and not experience.

say *Femme-de-Chambre*, if a single eye, slopping shoes, and a thick, cotton handkerchief pinned night-cap-wise over the head, would possibly allow that suggestive word)” (38). Curtis’s portrait of the woman, emphasizing the disarray of her dress, is partly a comic depiction of a lower-class figure for the amusement of his audience, but his insistence on the difference between a “chambermaid” and a “femme-de-chambre” translates that depiction into nationalist terms. That is, Curtis casts her as a uniquely American character, one whose failings are revealed by contrast to her more dignified European counterpart. The structure of Curtis’s account underscores the nationalist implications of the scene. Situated between passages recounting the glory and joy Curtis found in the Swiss Alps, the description of the Mountain House and its chambermaid provides an obvious negative counterpoint to Curtis’s European memories.

The lack of formality and civility in the hotel’s accommodations becomes embodied by the hotel’s architecture,⁷ which is a chaotic jumble of disorienting features. In particular, Curtis reports that the hotel’s parlor “seemed to have been dislocated by some tempestuous mountain ague”:

There are eight windows, and none of them opposite to any of the others; folding-doors which have gone down the side of the room in some wild architectural dance, and have never returned, and a row of small columns stretching in an independent line across the room, quite irrespective of the middle. It is a dangerous parlor for a nervous man. (39)

This description of the Mountain House places it in stark contrast to the dwelling house atop the Faulhorn in Switzerland, about which Curtis reminisces immediately before reporting his reactions to his Catskill hotel. Whereas nature has “touched” and

⁷ In *Culture and Comfort*, Katherine Grier discusses the parlor interiors of “palace hotels” in major American cities between 1830 and 1860 (32–43), particularly in relation to the ways in which they blurred lines between the domestic and the public. As I suggest in my analysis of *Lotus-Eating*, the interior of wilderness hotels might similarly be seen as blurring lines between the home and nature.

“caress[ed]” (37) the mountains surrounding the Faulhorn, here Curtis portrays nature as an intrusive, violent force. Disorderly, dislocated, and wild, the parlor architecture undermines Curtis’s earlier ability to imagine the Catskills as a surrogate Switzerland, a surrogate home. “Catskill” thus culminates with a pervasive sense of alienation. Perched on the verge of the precipice, Curtis and his traveling companions stare into the “black abyss of night” and dwell upon their distance from their happy experiences in Europe, talking of “pleasant days . . . which shall return no more” (39). To some extent, Curtis’s attitude here is similar to the void that Washington Irving experiences at the end of *A Tour on the Prairies*. But where, for Irving, that disconnection from nature was qualified by his reconnection with the eastern United States, for Curtis there remains an insurmountable gap not only between him and nature but also between him and his nation.

While Curtis subtly compares the Mountain House and the Faulhorn hotel, he also sets the Mountain House in relief against the hotel at Trenton Falls, a site he describes in the fourth letter of *Lotus-Eating*. Unlike the intrusive construction of the Catskill parlor, the Trenton Falls hotel “is spacious, and clean, and comfortable.” “There is no better hotel than that at Trenton,” Curtis asserts, largely because of its thoughtful setting and judicious design. “Moreover,” Curtis explains, “it is painted dark and not white, and stands very modestly on the edge of the woods that overhang the ravine of the falls” (65–66). While Curtis does not explicitly refer to the Mountain House here, his language makes it clear that this hotel serves as his point of reference. Unlike the “modest” Trenton Falls hotel, the Mountain House is painted a “glaring white” that creates a “vivid contrast with the dark green forest” surrounding it, making it visible “from a great distance upon

the river” (some eight or more miles away) (38). Somewhat like the walls and fences Curtis observes in the valley below, the Mountain House obtrusively asserts its presence upon the landscape. It not only disrupts the natural scene itself but also undermines its purported aim of enabling individuals to gain a closer appreciation of the natural world. Curtis writes that “There is something especially pleasant in the tranquil, *family-like* character of the house at Trenton” (70; my emphasis). The “family-like” Trenton hotel thus becomes a kind of surrogate home for Curtis, a status the Mountain House fails to achieve.

If the overall experience of the Catskill Mountain House leaves Curtis somewhat disenchanted, his first impression of Catskill Falls amplifies that disappointment. The nature of that disappointment changes significantly, however. Whereas Curtis concludes “Catskill” by contemplating the inadequacy of American in comparison to European landscapes, his focus shifts in “Catskill Falls” to the inadequacy of his experience of *any* landscape: that is, he suggests that all natural spectacles remain unsatisfying, the source of a nagging sense of loss or alienation even as they inspire momentary exhilaration. His mixed response to Catskill Falls—which inspires both deep admiration and marked sadness—centers on the relationship between the natural world and human development, a relationship that is vividly encapsulated by the falls themselves. Obstructed by a mill-dam that modifies its flow rate, the stream that forms the cascade must be “turned on” for spectators (47). Lamenting “the want of direct pleasure and exhilaration in nature” he sees as typifying most Americans (49), Curtis describes the hasty manner in which most visitors take in the falls:

The process of “doing” the sight, for those who are limited in time, is very methodical. You leave the hotel and drive in a coach to the bar-room. . . . You step out upon the balcony and look into the abyss....

You would gladly stay all day. But the sage of the party looks at his watch—remembers dinner—deems it time to think of returning; and you climb the staircase—step upon the balcony—throw a last look into the abyss—down the blue mistiness of the winding valley whose repose leads your thought far into eternal silence and summer, and mounting the coach you are boxed up again and delivered at the Mountain House just as the dinner-bell rings.

This is ludicrous. But most of us are really only shop-keepers, and natural spectacles are but shop-windows on a great scale. (47–48)

Through his repeated direct address, Curtis simulates for his readers the experience of being directed quickly through the falls. The disruptive dashes similarly underscore the structure of “doing the site,” the brevity of each clause reinforcing the sensation of being “boxed up.” Indeed, even the one moment that celebrates the escape from being “boxed up”—the description of looking down the valley and thinking of “eternal silence and summer”—serves to highlight the constraints on the visitor, for this thought is quickly punctuated by the need to return promptly to the hotel for dinner.⁸

Although the critique Curtis levels here focuses primarily on the regimentation of the visit and not on the regimentation of the fall itself, he gestures toward the effects such a methodical approach to nature has on the spectacle itself. Casting Catskill Falls as a consumer product, Curtis concludes his criticism by asserting that “natural spectacles are but shop-windows on a great scale.” Such is especially the case with Catskill Falls, for its natural beauty depends almost wholly upon the gates of the dam that regulate the water flow. The “direct pleasure” in nature for which Curtis yearns cannot be had, because the falls have already become a manufactured product, a pleasure necessarily mediated by

⁸ Helen Hunt Jackson similarly notes the role of the developing tourist infrastructure in influencing the tourist’s itinerary. Recounting her journey to the Yosemite Valley in California, Jackson complains that the stage company extended what could have been a one-day trip into a two-day affair—“with a view to the end of compelling travellers to sleep one more night on the way” (91).

the presence of the mill-dam, the bar-room, and the larger hotel.⁹ While Curtis evidences some misgivings about this tourist infrastructure and its potential for separating the individual from the natural world, he ultimately views these luxuries as *enabling* a better appreciation of the falls. Although Curtis criticizes this shop-window version of nature, it is precisely this feature that appeals to him. Catskill Falls offers the traveler a contact zone between nature and civilization. Indeed, Curtis points out that “beyond the mill and the dam, nature has claimed her own again” (50). For Curtis, this juxtaposition of the natural stream and its artificial enhancement is the salient feature of Catskill Falls. Despite being constructed as a tourist sight, the falls remain “very simple and beautiful” (50), possessing a “quiet grandeur” (51) that is only accentuated once the water is “turned on.” The full force of the falls creates a “rare and exquisite effect” (53), defying Curtis’s attempts to capture in words the colors he witnesses. The falls, Curtis discovers, offer none of the direct pleasure in nature he originally sought; instead, he suggests, their manipulation by the dam can offer the tourist something even better, an improved natural spectacle constructed, accessed, and improved through technological development of the site.

A troublesome contradiction remains at the heart of Curtis’s response to Catskill Falls, however, for as much as Curtis attempts to celebrate their “natural” beauty as an example of the benefits of the technological sublime, he cannot wholly escape the fact of the falls’ artificiality. Watching the water as the mill-dam gate is closed, Curtis notes that the stream “gradually dwindled, wasting from that full-bodied maturity, and sinking

⁹ In *Bits of Travel at Home*, Helen Hunt Jackson offers a similar critique of “the guide-book formula” (41) and its penchant for producing “statistical traveler[s]” who cannot appreciate the immediate experience of the land surrounding them.

again into infantine weakness and uncertainty” (53). He figures this scene as the water’s death (54), language that captures Curtis’s complicated response to the phenomenon of Catskill Falls (and, indeed, his response to the other tourist sites he visits). On the one hand, human intervention with the cascade has increased its beauty and accessibility, transforming it into the technological sublime and allowing for a democratic and dramatic enjoyment of the nation’s natural features. On the other hand, that same intervention has the ability to diminish significantly the falls’ attraction, rendering them just another source of regret and sadness.

The mill-dam’s regulation of the stream is not the only way in which Catskill Falls marks the interconnections between nature and culture. Just as the Catskill plateau has the Mountain House perched atop it, the falls are graced with “a very new and very neat white house and a bar-room, with a balcony over the abyss” (47). Unlike the Mountain House’s “dangerous parlor,” the bar-room at the falls is “picturesque,” suggesting that it achieves a certain architectural harmony with its surroundings (55). In contrast to the chaotic interior of the larger hotel, the smaller house is “neat” and orderly. As Curtis points out, the bar-room affords the traveler a “neat and well-cooked dinner” (55), but the house does not wholly separate the individual from the surrounding environment. Curtis writes that, as he and his companions enjoyed their dinner, “a wind furious enough for November, a very cataract of wind, dashed and swept along the mountain-sides, and Swansdowne and I did privately shiver” (55). Although home to certain comforts, the falls house is not so removed from nature as to be impervious to this “cataract of wind.” Indeed, the wind gust here recalls the “tempestuous mountain ague”

that has so disordered the Mountain House parlor, but its effects on Curtis are significantly different. Chilled though he is by the wind, Curtis finds in Catskill Falls a reassurance of his link with the natural world.

The conclusion of “Catskill Falls” thus slightly revises the conclusion of the previous letter, replacing melancholic nostalgia with fond memory. Just as he ends “Catskill,” Curtis concludes “Catskill Falls” perched near an “abyss”—but where the first letter dwells on a dark reminder of a lost past, the second closes with “a day that will sing as pleasantly through memory as the stream through the solitary dell” (56). Importantly, however, Curtis’s European travels still remain the background against which this new experience is set, for the men speak of Italy as they watch the “tranquil sunset” reflect in the water. Artificial and mediated though they are, the falls at Catskill nevertheless provide Curtis with as direct a pleasure in nature as he can hope to achieve. Curtis’s negative impressions of the Mountain House stem from its failure to accentuate the natural splendors that pre-exist it, and his similar response to the Catskills stems from their failure to match his Alpine expectations. In contrast, all of the development surrounding Catskill Falls accords with the setting of the ravine itself, and though Curtis is at first skeptical about these falls that must be turned on for the visitor, it is precisely this fact that improves their beauty for him. This harmonious conjunction of natural features and human development enables Curtis to return, once again, to his recollections of his European travels—and Curtis’s American experience becomes simply a springboard for Swiss reminiscences.

Curtis’s description of the tourist infrastructure he encounters at Catskill (and, for that matter, at many of the other tourist destinations he visits) taps into a rhetoric of

American progress, but despite his belief in the technological sublime, Curtis finally sees that “raw landscape” as inherently inferior to that of Europe. As Curtis’s tour progresses across the northeastern U.S., he calls increasing attention to the need for human art to develop the wild beauty of the American landscape—but Curtis clings to a persistent sense that that landscape fails to match the grandeur of his beloved Europe. Although Art can improve Nature in the United States, Curtis suggests, the U.S. will never match the beauty and magnitude of its Old World counterparts. Curtis’s responses to Niagara Falls and Lake George in New York typify this attitude, as they extend the impressions he first voices at Catskill and focus on nature as a manufactured spectacle. According to Curtis, Niagara’s status as a tourist site ironically diminishes travelers’ expectations for the falls. On slowly approaching Niagara through New York, the traveler becomes “quite unimpressed by the anticipation of his bourne, whose image has lost much of its grandeur in his mind by the household familiarity of the name” (76). In *Summer on the Lakes*, Margaret Fuller voices a similar sentiment. Writing of how books and paintings of Niagara Falls affected her response to them when she saw them in person, Fuller admits, “I thought only of comparing the effect on my mind with what I had read and heard. I looked for a short time, and then with almost a feeling of disappointment, turned to go to the other points of view to see if I was not mistaken in not feeling any surpassing emotion at this sight” (76). Like Curtis, Fuller has arrived at Niagara full of anticipation, and in a comic moment she discovers that she felt “most moved in the wrong place” (76). Instead of feeling awed by the British or American Falls, Fuller feels the greatest “thrill” upon viewing the rapids that precede the river’s dramatic plunge. “Happy were the first discoverers of Niagara,” she concludes, “those who could come unawares upon this view

and upon that, whose feelings were entirely their own” (77). Like Fuller, Curtis cannot approach Niagara Falls with feelings entirely his own. He likens this effect to that of first approaching Switzerland after residing in Europe for some time: the reputation of the area renders it far too familiar to retain its original interest. Curtis proceeds to dismiss such a reaction, however, calling disappointment in the actual experience of the falls “affected, or childish” (81).¹⁰ Indeed, as Curtis’s account of his time at Niagara makes clear, the falls achieve their grandeur not only by virtue of their natural appeal but also through the tourist apparatus that enables that natural splendor to be viewed.

According to Curtis, the beauty of Niagara consists in the “immediate neighborhood” (94) of the falls, which he claims are the “one interest” (92) for the traveler. Nothing else in the area is worth much attention. While such a comment may not be particularly surprising, given the immense scale of the falls, Curtis elaborates on his reasoning in telling fashion. Writing of the region surrounding Niagara Falls, Curtis admits that “civilization seems to have made small inroad upon the primeval grandeur of the spot. . . . They are not fair woods, but dark forests. They smite you only with a sense of magnificent space, as I fancy the impression of Rocky Mountain scenery, but which is akin to that of chaos” (93). Curtis is not celebrating the preservation of primeval nature here, as Thoreau might, but rather regretting the slow transformation of these “dark forests” into “fair woods.” If civilization had made greater inroads here, Curtis suggests, the area beyond the falls themselves would hold greater interest for the visitor: the chaos would be contained, ordered, pleasing. As it stands, however, Curtis is confronted by the

¹⁰ Curtis’s comment is not exactly a criticism of the kind of disappointment Fuller experiences at Niagara Falls, however, for in his description of the falls’ overwhelming sublimity (82) he includes the rapids on which Fuller focuses her greatest attention.

“barrenness” of the Canadian side of the falls (94), and he notes that “the American shore is wild, too, although the zealous activity of the little village at the Falls, and the white neatness of Lewiston, below, relieve the sense of desolation upon distant banks” (94). The American side of Niagara Falls is tolerable only insofar as human development is incorporated into the natural scene.

Curtis connects such improvements not just to aesthetic appreciation but also to national aspiration. The barren Canadian landscape signals “a country that has made no mark on history; where few men love to live, except those who have little choice; where the towns are stagnant and few; upon a country whose son no man is proud to be” (94). Curtis’s negative assessment of Canada positions his home country in a middle ground between the barren wilderness of its northern neighbor and the history and culture of its transatlantic forebears. The American side’s nascent development of Niagara Falls is a sign of the nation’s comparative promise—while the Catskills may be no Alps and America no Europe, at least it is not Canada.¹¹

As William Irwin notes in *The New Niagara*, his insightful history of the development and commercialization of Niagara Falls, the site became precisely such a symbol “of an American future in which economic and technological development and natural beauty could be reconciled and promoted and preserved” (xvii).¹² The dark, chaotic forests surrounding Niagara thus stand in marked contrast to the managed chaos of Niagara Falls themselves. While Curtis repeatedly refers to the Niagara rapids as “a

¹¹ John Carlos Rowe has written that “Too often in nineteenth-century United States culture, Canada figures primarily as an imagined place of ultimate freedom and its border a sort of psychic double for the internal border dividing South from North” (85). To the extent that Curtis represents Canada as a vast, open wilderness, he may be said to situate it as a place of “ultimate freedom.” But it is worth nothing that, for Curtis, such ultimate freedom is not an ideal to be sought but a threat to be avoided.

¹² For more on the iconic status of Niagara Falls in American culture, see the books by McGreevey and McKinsey and the essay by Sayre.

chaos of wild water” (82), the chaos of the falls does not unsettle him as the dark Canadian forests do.¹³ Niagara, Curtis explains, is “the centre of a vortex of travel” (75), and he emphasizes throughout his account the tourist infrastructure that enables his immersion in that vortex. Upon disembarking the train that brings them to Niagara Falls, Curtis wryly observes, visitors seek out not the cataract but the Cataract House (81). Irwin notes that “Hotels played a decisive role in bringing civilization to Niagara Falls; they increased the accessibility of Niagara’s scenic attractions, eased the burden on sightseers, and diversified the tourists’ experience” (21). These hotels “allowed greater communion with the environment,” but did so through a “familiar world of convenience and social class” (21). As we have seen, Curtis praises precisely this form of communion with nature in response to Catskill Falls, and he expands on that praise in response to Niagara Falls. “Nothing struck me more than the ease of access to the very verge of the cataract” (90), he writes, enumerating later the multitude of ways by which the visitor may explore the falls.¹⁴

As much as Curtis undoubtedly appreciates the natural grandeur of the falls, he is equally impressed by the human innovation that has transformed the falls into a tourist spectacle.¹⁵ Having traveled to the base of the falls on the steamboat *Maid of the Mist*, Curtis describes his response:

There we tremble, in perfect security, mocking with our little Maid the might of Niagara. For man is the magician, and as he plants his foot upon the neck of

¹³ Curtis’s focus on distinctions between chaos and order reiterate his earlier concern with these issues in response to the Catskill Mountain House and the Trenton Falls hotel.

¹⁴ As Curtis notes, you can view the falls “from below, from above, from the sides, from the suspension bridge, and, finally, you must steam up to its very front, and then climb down behind it” (97).

¹⁵ Fuller, by contrast, sees the development as an excusable presence because the grandeur of the falls overshadows everything else: “People complain of the buildings at Niagara,” she writes, “and fear to see it further deformed. I cannot sympathize with such an apprehension: the spectacle is capable to swallow up all such objects; they are not seen in the great whole, more than an earthworm in a wide field” (73).

mountains, and passes the awful Alps, safely as the Israelites through the divided sea, so he dips his hand into Niagara, and gathering a few drops from its waters, educes a force from Niagara itself, by which he confronts and defies it. The very water which as steam was moving us to the Cataract, had plunged over it as spray a few hours before. (100)

Curtis hints at the dangers inherent in a voyage on the *Maid of the Mist*, suggesting that the “Cataract [might] mock our feeble power, and will claim its victims” (99). But the episode confirms—rather than undermines—human power. Thus confronting and defying Niagara Falls, Curtis does so “in perfect security.” The “direct pleasure” he gains from his contact with the falls is an assurance of human control over nature, the ability to harness even the waters of Niagara Falls. The rhetoric and imagery Curtis employs here are clearly of domination and mastery, his way of wringing the “fair woods” out of the swirling, chaotic waters of Niagara after all. But the excess of his rhetoric is balanced by the lingering recognition that, however Niagara Falls has been reined in for touristic consumption, the power of the falls ultimately escapes such totalizing control—either through technology or art. Curtis thus closes his second chapter about Niagara with a recognition of the limits of his own representation: “If you have been at Niagara, what I have written may recall it, but can hardly paint, except to remembrance, the austere grandeur and dreamy beauties which are its characteristics” (102).

Curtis’s response to Lake George is even more explicit in articulating his ideal vision of nature improved by human intervention. Whereas Niagara succeeds in incorporating the human and the natural, Lake George fails—and that failure becomes a sign of the larger failure of the American landscape. One of the central flaws in Lake George, according to Curtis, is the misplacement of a hotel on its shore: “Instead . . . of a fine hotel at the extremity of the Lake, commanding a view of its length, and situated in

grounds properly picturesque, there is a house on one side of the end, looking across it to the opposite mountain, and forever teasing the traveller with wonder that it stands where it does" (129). The distinction between the "fine hotel" and the mere "house" originates not necessarily in their relative amenities but primarily in their *location*. The two buildings are distinguished based on their respective views of the lake. Curtis's core concern here is the lake as a visual product to be consumed by the traveler, its picturesque value; the hotel exists to enable a better appreciation of the lake's natural beauty, and the current house fails to meet that standard. As Alison Byerly has noted, "The picturesque appreciation of landscape was in fact an appropriation of landscape that had more to do with the attitude of the viewer than the inherent qualities of the scene, which was valued only to the degree that it could be made to conform to preconceived aesthetic principles" (56). Curtis's complaint here expresses precisely such an attitude. Whereas Niagara excels at enabling the visitor to view the falls from multiple vantage points, Lake George remains insufficiently developed for the tourist, its picturesque potential untapped.

Even if the hotel at Caldwell were properly situated, however, Curtis suggests that the natural setting of Lake George is "too sad and lonely," its evergreen forests presenting a "melancholy monotony of impression" (134). As with his criticism of the "dark forests" surrounding Niagara Falls, Curtis's evaluation of Lake George focuses on its unimproved status. It is "a simple mountain lake upon the verge of the wilderness," a "wild region" that exhibits no "signs of life" (130).¹⁶ Simple and largely untouched by

¹⁶ In a footnote to the 1831 edition of *The Last of the Mohicans*, James Fenimore Cooper offers a similar criticism of Lake George: "The beauties of Lake George are well known to every American tourist. In the height of the mountains which surround it, and in artificial accessories, it is inferior to the finest of the

civilization, the lake and its surroundings are an aesthetic failure to Curtis. That aesthetic failure is also a touristic failure. Unlike the “vortex of travel” that characterizes Niagara Falls, Lake George is a “strange lull in excitement” (129) on his tour. Situated between stops at Saratoga and Nahant, which Curtis describes as once-fashionable resort towns that have become “the monument of merry, but dead old days” (147), Lake George has little hope of mimicking the successes of these other resorts.

Curtis uses these observations about Lake George as the basis for elaborating his aesthetic theory of landscape, an attitude that, as we have seen, underlies most of *Lotus-Eating* but that Curtis only explicitly articulates in his chapter on the lake. “We have a right to require in scenery the presence of the improvement which Nature there suggested” (135), Curtis contends. The aim should be not to tame the natural world, exactly, but to highlight its distinctiveness in ways already implicit in the land itself—a goal singularly missed by the ill-placed rooming house on Lake George. For Curtis, this is not a problem localized to Lake George but one of national scale. There is a “positive want of the picturesque in American scenery and life” (140), Curtis complains, noting that the nation possesses only a “vast and unimproved extent” and none of “the charms that follow long history” (138). By contrast, European scenery exhibits the “finest combination of natural sublimity and beauty with the artistic results which that sublimity and beauty have inspired” (135). Curtis’s comparison of American and European landscape culminates with his negative assessment of his nation’s natural and cultural appeal: “We have nothing so grand and accessible as Switzerland, nothing so beautiful as

Swiss and Italian lakes, while in outline and purity of water it is fully their equal; and in the number and disposition of its isles and islets much superior to them all together” (203n). Lake George remains insufficiently accessorized, failing to take full advantage of its natural features.

Italy, nothing so civilized as Paris, nothing so comfortable as England” (138). On the one hand, this passage is a call-to-arms for midcentury America to make the most of its “vast and unimproved extent,” to improve those natural features in such a way as to rival the sublime beauty of the Swiss or Italian Alps or the pastoral comfort of the English countryside. On the other hand, though, Curtis’s comment is a lament of the United States’s failure to match its European counterparts in terms of natural beauty and cultural abilities. The gap between the two continents remains as wide as the Atlantic, and Curtis’s pervasive longing for Europe renders *Lotus-Eating* an oddly anti-nationalist text that asserts and then undermines the grandeur of the American natural wonders that are its subject.

The final three chapters of *Lotus-Eating*—one about Nahant, two about Newport—are rich with Curtis’s melancholic references to his European experiences. The text thus closes with Curtis’s imaginative return to Europe. Having toured some of the most noteworthy summer resorts in the United States, at the end of his tour Curtis himself resorts to the solace of remembering his time in more beautiful, more cultured places. As with his earlier account of the Catskills, Curtis’s descriptions of Nahant and Newport become tinged with a nostalgia that recasts his American excursion in terms of its likeness to his European experience. “One night we sang no longer,” Curtis recalls about his time in Nahant, “but lost in silence watched the bay *as if it had been the bay of Naples*, when the sudden burst of a distant serenade filled the midnight” (156–57; my emphasis). Similarly, Newport possesses “an Italian air” and “the luxurious languor of the South” (179), by which Curtis means not the American South but the southern Mediterranean coast of Italy. Noting that Newport’s appearance “reminds you of days

and feelings upon the Roman Compagna,” Curtis ends his travel account by transforming the American landscape into a blank slate to be colored by the traveler’s imaginative associations of other lands. “But best of all,” Curtis writes, “quaint old Newport lies white against its hill, and the sinking sun plays with it, *making it what city you will*, of all the famous and stately towns upon the sea” (205; my emphasis). As with the other destinations Curtis visits, then, Newport too becomes merely a reminder of Europe. Although his summer tour enables him to come into closer contact with the natural splendor of his nation, for Curtis, that contact is less a source of nationalist pride than a sign of how the United States fails to match the picturesqueness, the rich associations, and the blending of nature and culture that are the hallmarks of the Old World.

A “National Blessing”:
Taylor’s *Colorado: A Summer Trip*

Whereas Curtis’s *Lotus-Eating* constitutes an ironic turn away from American natural features in favor of a return to their European counterparts even as the volume narrates a tour of American scenic resorts, Bayard Taylor’s *Colorado: A Summer Trip* celebrates the emergent significance of America’s natural and commercial resources. Written in the wake of the Civil War and published in January 1867, Taylor’s text is deeply concerned with reconstructing American nationalism. If the nation had become, during the years leading up to secession and war, a “house divided,”¹⁷ Taylor’s *Colorado* attempts to reunify that house by appealing to his readers’ sense of America’s manifest destiny. The book recounts Taylor’s journey westward through Denver and into the Colorado Rockies, where he and several companions travel on horseback and on foot to

¹⁷ This is, of course, the biblical reference to Mark 3:25 that Abraham Lincoln used in his speech to the Illinois Republican State Convention on June 16, 1858.

explore the mountain wilderness. Throughout his account, Taylor calls attention to the commercial potential and natural grandeur of the Colorado landscape—first, as a surprisingly rich agricultural region; next, as an area replete with mineral wealth yet to be tapped; and finally, as a setting for commercialized wilderness tourism. Not just a travel book recounting one man’s journey westward, *Colorado* is also an exploration of the entire nation’s direction in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. The economic advantages of Colorado stand in for the recovering economy of the nation as a whole. Like Curtis, Taylor develops his portrait of Colorado against the background of his European and Asian travels. In contrast to Curtis, however, Taylor uses that comparison not to diminish America’s prospects but to affirm them. Indeed, in *Colorado*, Taylor not only embraces the technological sublime but also views that *American* improvement of nature as a sure sign of the nation’s *international* importance. Recognizing the coexistence of this international rhetoric alongside Taylor’s persistent evocation of the Civil War suggests the transnational aspects of *Colorado*. As Paul Giles writes, placing “American literature in a transnationalist framework is to elucidate ways in which it necessarily enters into negotiation with questions of global power” (72), and while Taylor’s text focuses first on questions of national unity, it does so through reference to America’s global presence.¹⁸ Furthermore, acknowledging this dynamic refutes Larzer Ziff’s contention that domestic American travel literature merely satisfies a provincialism that remains unconnected to the larger world.

¹⁸ In his essay, Giles also suggests that critics’ too-exclusive focus on the Civil War “works implicitly to shore up the nation-building agendas of the United States” (74). “Returning so obsessively to the trauma of the Civil War,” he writes, “indirectly asserts the primacy of traditional American ideals of federal unity and freedom” (74). Joining its international concern with its national focus on the Civil War, Taylor’s text provides a particularly complicated example of the intersections of national and transnational identity.

Although *Colorado* seems quite self-conscious about its historical moment, Taylor himself was modest in his expectations for his book—even though, by the time he published the book, Taylor was a well-known author and editor. In a letter to a friend, Taylor writes that the volume would likely be published only “for temporary circulation (I am aware that such things have a temporary value)” (qtd. in Wermuth 67).¹⁹ Taylor’s self-assessment of his book’s “temporary value” has been reinforced by the scant attention dedicated not just to this particular text but also to his entire oeuvre of travel literature (and, for that matter, his poetry and fiction as well).²⁰ For instance, Leon Vincent, writing (without irony) in a 1906 volume titled *American Literary Masters*, contends that despite Taylor’s commercial success he “remains . . . a somewhat pathetic figure in American letters” (408). Similarly, concluding a more recent study of Taylor’s literary career, Paul Wermuth writes, “On the sum of Taylor’s writings, not very much, admittedly, is worth preserving” (177).²¹ *Colorado*, Wermuth claims, is “not one of [Taylor’s] most exciting books,” calling it “Twain’s *Roughing It* with the humor removed” (66). Despite these dismissive assessments of *Colorado*, the self-conscious ways in which Taylor’s text addresses its political and historical context make it not only an interesting but also an important work. Moreover, Taylor’s nuanced treatment of the

¹⁹ The letter appears in John R. Schulz, ed., *The Unpublished Letters of Bayard Taylor in the Huntington Library* (San Marino, 1937), p. 91.

²⁰ Like Curtis, aside from the occasional reference in or contextual commentary for some other figure, Taylor is not a frequent subject for current literary criticism. He was, however, significantly popular in the mid-nineteenth century.

²¹ Wermuth goes on to assert that “Taylor remains for us a figure of more historical than literary interest” (177); it is not Taylor’s work that is interesting, “but what it tells one about the taste of [his] age” (179). According to Wermuth, Bayard Taylor was limited by his time. Unable to transcend the assumptions and attitudes of the Genteel Tradition, Taylor was prevented from “realiz[ing] his full potential” (21). Despite its limitations, Wermuth’s study of Taylor’s career is a valuable one, largely because it stands as one of very few (relatively) recent scholarly treatments of the author and his work.

Colorado landscape deserves special attention. Portraying the intersections between nature and commerce that abound in the Colorado territory, Taylor suggests that the re-creation of the American union will rely partly upon recreation in its wilderness.

Although he celebrates the aesthetic beauty of the Colorado Rockies, Taylor ultimately focuses on the economic promise of the American West—a promise that, like Irving and Curtis before him, he sees as lying primarily in human development of the land’s natural resources. That is, as much as Taylor revels in the wilderness characteristics of the land during his trip, the land itself is usually of secondary importance to its practical, economic potential. As Taylor remarks about the Boulder Valley of north-central Colorado, “Here I saw again how much Civilization improves Nature” (158)—a comment that clearly echoes Curtis’s sentiment in *Lotus-Eating*. In contrast to authors like Kirkland and Thoreau before him, who emphasize the spiritual or intellectual improvements to be gained from close contact with nature, Taylor largely embraces its commercial potential. Yet Taylor, like Curtis to some extent, emphasizes those commercial aspects because they ultimately enable a greater aesthetic or recreational appreciation of nature—and it is this increased access to America’s natural attractions that Taylor focuses on in order to reaffirm a post–Civil War American nationalism.

Indeed, from the beginning of *Colorado*, it is clear that Taylor’s concern with commerce arises out of his concern for the nation as a whole. One of Taylor’s motivations for visiting Colorado, he explains in his opening chapter, is “to take a superficial view of both railroad routes to the Rocky Mountains” (4), in order to assess

each route's political and economic viability.²² While a description of the Great Plains and the Colorado Rockies forms the core of Taylor's text, the political upheaval of the Civil War and its aftermath provides a crucial frame for Taylor's account. Indeed, Taylor both opens and closes his book about Colorado not by discussing that U.S. territory but by referring to the Civil War and the resulting political tensions in America.²³ The war had ended more than a year before he set out for Colorado, and Taylor remains acutely aware that the nation's future was still far from settled. Although Taylor's comments about the war initially seem to be passing references that casually arise from the trajectory of his narrative, the account of this summer trip ultimately attempts to heal the wounds opened by the Civil War by redirecting sectional antagonism into a healing nationalism. It is not an accident, then, that one of the core commercial interests pervading *Colorado* is the transcontinental railroad, a ready symbol for the reunification of the nation as well as an emblem of human development of nature.

Taylor's first chapter introduces both the relationship between technology and nature that will figure so prominently in *Colorado* and the inescapable political context that frames the text. Recounting his travels on the Pacific Railroad from St. Louis to Jefferson City, Missouri, and following the generic conventions of most travel books, Taylor focuses our attention on the passing landscape. "In the United States," he writes, "railroads avoid the finest scenery" (1). As a result, the railroad route to Jefferson City affords only three "picturesque" points. Lamenting the fact that the railroad does not pass

²² Taylor's "summer trip" is thus linked to a much larger endeavor, much as Irving's "tour" is implicated in America's Indian Removal Act and westward expansion and as even Thoreau's trip to Katahdin is set against the commercial background of logging.

²³ The Civil War surfaces elsewhere in the text, too, but the opening and closing chapters contain the most fully developed direct references to the nation's recent war.

by “rich, well-farmed” land that is “lovely to look upon” (2), Taylor links cultivation and advancing settlement with beauty. This link becomes clearest in his description of the Missouri River, which he labels “that ugliest of all rivers” (2). Noting that the river’s surface is “unbroken” by any sign of shipping or commerce, Taylor concludes, “Deserted, monotonous, hideous, treacherous, with its forever-shifting sands and snags, it almost seems to repel settlement, even as it repels poetry and art” (2). In part, Taylor’s language here is a straightforward description of the Missouri River, which in the mid-nineteenth century was a particularly difficult waterway to navigate because of its braided channels of varying depths. His turn from the physical features of the river to their cultural implications, however, is worth further notice, especially when we consider his peculiar shift in subject in the subsequent paragraph.

Taylor disrupts his initial focus on the Missouri landscape with a paragraph noting that his fellow travelers included “five handcuffed burglars, three of whom had been Morgan’s guerrillas” (2).²⁴ Observing that other passengers “always said ‘Rebels’ instead of ‘Confederates’” when speaking of the war, Taylor infers that their “political condition was healthy” (2). The abruptness of Taylor’s shift in subject casts his landscape description in a new light: his commentary on the “treacherous” land leads him to comment on Confederate treachery. Like the river’s “forever-shifting sands and snags,” which often lay hidden just beneath the water’s surface, just out of eyesight, so too would these guerrilla Rebels have operated out of plain view. The Missouri River valley, it seems then, stands in for the secessionist states as a whole. A territory bereft of “poetry

²⁴ John Hunt Morgan was a Confederate cavalry officer who led raids throughout Kentucky, Indiana, and Ohio during the Civil War. For more on Morgan’s guerrillas, see Edison H. Thomas’s *John Hunt Morgan and His Raiders*.

and art,” it “repel[s]” civilization itself. Like the postbellum South, it needs progressive settlement that will make over its ugly political and natural landscape.²⁵ Taylor thus opens his account of western territories with a reminder of the conflict between northern and southern states, and that frame is crucial for understanding the nationalist argument embedded in *Colorado*.

After this brief digression about his fellow passengers, Taylor returns his attention to the natural environment through which he passes. Significantly, the tenor of his description is radically different from his previous tone. The repellent, deserted nature of the Missouri gives way to a fertile expanse that Taylor compares favorably to similar tracts in the Great Lakes region:

The swells are longer, with deeper and broader hollows between, and the soil appears to be of uniform fertility. On either side the range of vision extends for eight or ten miles, over great fields of the greenest grass and grain, dotted here and there with orchards, and crossed by long, narrow belts of timber, which mark the courses of streams. . . . Hedges of Osage orange are frequent; the fields are clean and smooth as a piece of broadcloth; the houses comfortable, and there is nothing to be seen of that roughness and shabbiness which usually marks a newly settled country. (2–3)

The contrast Taylor establishes between the Missouri River (“that ugliest of all rivers”) and this region (“one of the loveliest regions in the United States” [2]) is stark. Where one is barren and deserted, the other is rich with a potential that is already being realized; where the Missouri repels civilization, the prairie invites it. Having just reminded readers of the ruptures caused by the Civil War, Taylor smoothes over that roughness by turning from the past to a future embodied in the land.

²⁵ Indeed, this is precisely the subject that Taylor raises in the final chapter of *Colorado*, emphasizing the need to “diversify the course of emigration” in order to reconstruct the South. A “current” of southward emigration matched by a “counter-current” of northward emigration, Taylor contends, would be a “blessing to the country” (185). Such a pattern of emigration would displace sectionalism with nationalism.

Such a strategy is a recurrent one for Taylor, and he concludes his opening chapter with a much more explicit evocation of the recently ended conflict. That Taylor raises these issues at the opening of a travel account that otherwise sparsely addresses the Civil War suggests the extent to which the text is concerned with reasserting a nationalism dissolved by the conflict. *Colorado's* first chapter ends with Taylor's impressions of Lawrence, Kansas.²⁶ After briefly describing what is now a thriving downtown, Taylor notes that "The stockades of the late war, and the intrenchments of the earlier and prophetic war, are still to be seen upon the hill. So young a town, and such a history! Yet all now is peace, activity, and hopeful prosperity" (7). In this culminating view of the town, Taylor subtly revises and secularizes John Winthrop's city upon a hill trope. Winthrop concludes his sermon "A Model of Christian Charity" by admonishing his audience that "we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill."²⁷ Winthrop proceeds, "The eyes of all people are upon us, so that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world" (180). Just as the Massachusetts Bay Colony was to stand as a model community for the seventeenth-century world, so too does Taylor suggest that Lawrence can stand as a model city in the aftermath of the Civil War. Largely destroyed by ten years of armed conflict between proslavery and Free-Soil forces in the years leading up to the war, Lawrence has now "completely arisen from her ruins" (6). The remnants of the war stand on the hill as a

²⁶ The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 repealed the Missouri Compromise's limitations on slavery, thereby opening to slavery territories that were previously free. As a result, Kansas became a flash point of political conflict over the question of slavery in the years leading up to the Civil War, when the state was referred to as "Bleeding Kansas." In particular, Lawrence was the site of a proslavery posse attack in 1856, followed by the retributive killings of five proslavery settlers by abolitionist John Brown.

²⁷ Winthrop, in turn, is alluding to Matthew 5:14.

reminder of the town's destruction and of the nation's potential dissolution, but they also signal hope for postbellum America. If Lawrence can successfully rebuild itself in such an extremely short period, Taylor suggests, so too might the rest of the United States overcome its sectionalism. His intonation about the town—"So young a town, and such a history!"—could apply equally as well to the nation as a whole, sounding a hopeful note for the nation's recovery. For Taylor, economic (re)development such as that evidenced by Lawrence will enable the nation to move beyond its destructive past and into a prosperous future.

Taylor's focus on the farming practices of Kansas and Colorado highlights such prosperity. Even as he praises the innovation that has enabled crops to grow in the otherwise arid climate, Taylor also implicitly acknowledges the way in which that prosperity is founded on another kind of conflict. Having expected to view the Great American Desert on his journey through Kansas, Taylor finds instead "some of the finest agricultural regions on the globe" (20). (The desert, Taylor concludes, is a myth.) Colorado is similarly a surprise for Taylor, and its numerous ranches suggest the power human cultivation can exert over the land. Taylor's language typifies the rhetoric of the technological sublime, as he writes of the Colorado plains: "It almost seems as if Nature were in the habit of making a last desperate attempt to resist the subjugation of her wild, unploughed domains" (42).²⁸ Casting the land as an object to be subjugated, Taylor figures farming as a "battle" (42) that will inevitably be won by the farmers. Nature's "last desperate attempt" will be in vain.

²⁸ The sexually charged language of male domination is fairly obvious here, and it is a prime example of the kind of representations of the American frontier that Annette Kolodny critiques in *The Lay of the Land*. In addition, given Taylor's framing of his trip with reference to the Civil War, the issue of subjugation might carry additional resonance here.

The primary weapon in this figurative battle is the practice of irrigation. In his chapter “Farming in Colorado,” Taylor describes at length the transformations effected by irrigation, praising them as a welcome sign of progress:

I remember that my admiration of the agricultural capacities of California, in 1849, subjected me to many derogatory epithets; hence, one who crosses these brown plains at the end of summer, may laugh incredulously when I say that all the country, between the river and the mountains—every upland and ridge where water can be made to flow—will in time be as rich a farming region as any in the East. The capacity of soil to hold moisture will increase; trees will then grow where it would now be hopeless to plant them; hedges will take the place of costly fences, and the character of the country will undergo a complete change. (43)

Taylor’s vision for this converted landscape is akin to Irving’s vision for the honey camp, and it similarly imagines a comprehensive transformation: *all the country* that can be used for profitable farming should be put to such a use.²⁹ While Taylor imagines natural features (hedges) replacing manmade structures (fences), he underscores the comparative cost of those fences. His point, finally, is an economic one, and for Taylor the economic becomes intertwined with the aesthetic. In a passage that recalls his earlier lament that the ugly Missouri River had no signs of commerce, Taylor provides his reader with a prospect view of the surrounding Colorado farmland. Having arrived at the ranch of one Colonel Sopris, Taylor explains, “From the window of his parlor I looked out upon several miles of beautiful wheat, a long pasture-ridge beyond, and the grand summit of Long’s Peak in the distance” (43). From his domestic viewpoint, Taylor surveys a domesticated landscape. Taylor initially emphasizes the beauty of this picturesque scene, but in the remainder of the paragraph, he catalogues the yield and income derived from these fields. The real beauty here, Taylor implies, is not the natural scene itself but rather

²⁹ Later in this chapter, Taylor suggests that even where no running water appears on the land’s surface, wells can be used to pump groundwater into irrigation ditches (45). He also notes that a private company is currently constructing an irrigation ditch to supply the city of Denver with additional water.

the monetary value represented by that beauty. “Nature,” he later summarizes, “after vainly attempting to drive off Man, makes up her mind to reward his persistence” (45).

Taylor’s characterization of nature subtly erases the exploitative impulse behind his admiration of irrigation, recasting the relationship between nature and humans as one of willful reward rather than one of subjugation.

If Taylor’s description of farming implies a violence enacted on the landscape and then erases it, his portrayal of mining is much more explicit—and negative—in its characterizations. Whereas Lawrence, Kansas, has risen from its own ashes to become an agricultural boomtown, the mining communities of the Colorado foothills threaten to reduce their natural surroundings to another pile of ashes.³⁰ Taylor’s description of Lawrence emphasizes the town’s rebirth, the power of the land to sustain its growing population, and the resultant political “health” such economic revitalization will mean. In contrast, Taylor figures the mining operations he encounters as a plague on the land. “Nature seems to be suffering from an attack of confluent small-pox” (56), Taylor remarks of an area that has been entirely deforested. Writing of the North Clear Creek canyon, Taylor notes numerous human impositions on the land. Although he refrains from directly commenting on the desolation and destruction evident in these mining communities, his language clearly communicates a subtle criticism:

The precipitous sides of the cañon were freckled with the holes and dirt-piles of experimental shafts; the swift waters of the stream had the hue of “tailings;” and presently the smoke from the smelting works of the Lyons Company began to cloud the pure mountain air. . . .

³⁰ “It was dismal,” Taylor remarks, “to see how much of the pine forests, with which the steeps were clothed, had been wantonly or carelessly destroyed by fire” (52). It is unclear whether these fires were natural forest fires or human-caused wildfires, but Taylor’s use of “wantonly or carelessly” suggests some human agency in causing the fires. Such a reading would accord with Taylor’s later representations of the mining settlements, which are much less ambiguous in their portrayal of “wanton” behavior toward nature.

. . . The houses are jammed into the narrow bed of the cañon, employing all sorts of fantastic expedients to find room and support themselves. Under them a filthy stream falls down the defile over a succession of dams. (53–54)

Its narrow floor “jammed” with ramshackle buildings, its air “cloud[ed],” and its streams “filthy” from mining by-products, the canyon, Taylor suggests, is not simply a defile but has been defiled. Whereas the ranches of the foothills stand as signs of human improvement upon nature, the mines signal its degradation—and Taylor’s careful diction here reinforces such an interpretation. The picturesque view of rolling wheat fields is replaced by the “odd, grotesque, unusual” spectacle of a mining town where “no feature can be called attractive” (57).³¹

Despite the negative tenor of these descriptions, however, Taylor refrains from an outright criticism of mining as a whole. Indeed, as he points out, “this hideous slashing, tearing, and turning upside down is the surest indication of mineral wealth” (56). For Taylor, the economic rewards to be gained from mining more than compensate for whatever aesthetic drawbacks it incurs. Hideous and grotesque though the mining enterprise may be, it promises a richness and wealth that Taylor casts on a national scale: “Colorado, alone, ought to furnish the amount of the national debt within the next century. *The gold is here*, and the silver, the copper, and lead,—possibly, platina (there are already rumors of it),—and all that is needed is invention, intelligence, and properly organized enterprise” (68). Like the arid landscape of the Colorado plains, which only

³¹ In *Bits of Travel at Home*, Helen Hunt Jackson describes a similar scene. The old mining fields “are dismal beyond description.” She continues, “The earth has been torn up with pick-axes, and gullied by forced streams; the rocks have been blasted and quarried and piled in confusion; no green thing grows for acres; the dull yellow of the earth and the black and white and gray of the heaped stones give a coloring like that of volcanic ruins; and the shapes into which many of the softer stones have been worn by the action of water are so like the shapes of bones that it adds another element of horror to the picture. Again and again we saw spots which looked as if graveyards full of buried monsters had been broken open, and the skeletons strewn about” (89).

requires the innovations of irrigation to become fertile farmland, so too are the Colorado mountains awaiting the intervention of human commerce. Nature will reward man's persistence yet again. Throughout his tour of the agricultural and mining regions of Colorado, Taylor expresses his faith in the technological sublime, placing great emphasis on the power of such "properly organized enterprise" to transform an unyielding landscape into a bounty of grain and precious metals. In turn, he implies, such commercial wealth will improve the political health of the entire nation.

Taylor not only celebrates the wealth to be obtained by mining but also romanticizes the individual freedom to be found on the frontier. Idealizing the "primitive" life of mining towns, Taylor contends that the inhabitants are "more natural" and free from "restraint," having "cast off [their] assumed shell[s]" to become their true selves (58). Such a romantic view is hardly unconventional, but even as he emphasizes its "primitive" features, Taylor also insists on Colorado's nascent cosmopolitanism. Indeed, the population of Central City contains "representatives of all parts of the United States and Europe" (58). Furthermore, during a lecture in the small mountain community of Buckskin Joe, Taylor notes the tendency of the "more or less ignorant adventurers" to move on to Montana and Idaho. As a result, Colorado's population has become "for the most part men of education and natural refinement" (120), having rid itself of undesirable and lawless settlers. In Taylor's representation, then, Colorado becomes a contact zone between the natural and the refined, and the local and the national. He figures the typical Coloradoan as exhibiting "the precise point where the elements of the rowdy begin to

disappear, and those of the gentleman manifest themselves” (77).³² The result, Taylor suggests, is a balance between opposing traits that “seem to supply each other’s deficiencies” and “improve the American breed of men” (127). He thus figures Colorado as a peculiar site of American improvement, a region where the nation might realize not simply its economic promise but its moral promise as well.

While Taylor is deeply impressed by the commercial promise of Colorado’s farming and mining enterprises, these communities are largely a prelude to his central concern: Colorado’s Rocky Mountains and their wilderness environment. If part of Taylor’s aim in making this trip is to survey the railroads and the development they have enabled, he also wants to experience the adventure of traveling through largely uninhabited territory—to experience nature’s “wild, unploughed domains” before they succumb to the advancing civilization Taylor otherwise celebrates. To achieve this end, Taylor and his companions “take leave of such civilization as gold mining carries with it” (76) and prepare for a horseback expedition into the “wilder regions” of the Rocky Mountain interior.³³ As Taylor admits near the conclusion of his account, he is “doubly glad” to have toured the Rockies “while there are still buffaloes and danger of Indians on the Plains . . . and landscapes to enjoy which have never yet been described” (166).

³² In *El Dorado*, Taylor notes a similar phenomenon among the mining communities of California. “Abundance of gold does not always beget, as moralists tell us, a grasping and avaricious spirit. The principles of hospitality were as faithfully observed in the rude tents of the diggers as they could be by the thrifty farmers of the North and West. The cosmopolitan cast of society in California, resulting from the commingling of so many races and the primitive mode of life, gave a character of good-fellowship to all its members; and in no part of the world have I ever seen help more freely given to the needy, or more ready co-operation in any humane proposition” (79).

³³ Much like Twain will recount in *Roughing It*, Taylor notes in great detail the “luxuries” he is forced to “discard” in preparation for entering the High Rockies: “No cases of bottles, or boxes of tin cans, accompany us; we have no forks, nor plates, but one tin cup apiece, and a single spoon for the whole company. The culinary utensils consist of a frying-pan and a coffee-pot. To be sure, we have visions of mountain-trout, and of elk-steak, broiled on skewers; but these may be fairly permitted, without branding us as epicureans. The whole outfit is of the Robinson Crusoe character” (76).

Taylor's self-representation clearly taps into a familiar strain of masculine adventure narrative, but his response to the Colorado landscape is not simply a struggle between individual and nature. Rather, it is an attempt to reconstruct American nationalism through the land itself by imagining a recreational wilderness where Americans from all sections of the country could come together and mutually benefit from their interactions with one another and with nature. Taylor's experience of the Rocky Mountains culminates, then, with a vision of nature and commerce united in restoring national unity.

Despite relying on the trappings of adventure narratives, Taylor's travels through the Colorado wilderness actually provide little in the way of narrative suspense or drama.³⁴ Instead, his response to and representation of the landscape emerge as the dominant issues in the account: the events in *Colorado* are less important than the scenes of Colorado. It is through his figuration of the landscape that Taylor signals the nationalist designs of his text. Just as the farmlands and mines promise a wealthy future for the United States, so too does the mountain wilderness suggest the nation's return to prominence in the aftermath of the Civil War.

Interestingly, Taylor employs an avowedly *internationalist* perspective to convey his sense of the exceptionalism of the Colorado landscape. While he occasionally uses the familiar eastern United States as a point of reference,³⁵ Taylor also figures the natural

³⁴ Unlike Thoreau, whose "Ktaadn" builds to its climactic moments on the flanks of the mountain, or even Irving, whose *Tour* builds in its own way to the buffalo hunt, Taylor does not structure his account as a progression toward a clear culminating moment.

³⁵ For instance, Taylor explains that the elevation of the town of Empire, Colorado, would be the equivalent of stacking the Catskill Mountains of New York atop New Hampshire's Mount Washington (75). Similarly, he later compares the southward view from one Rocky Mountain pass to the view obtained of the Saco River valley from Mount Willard in the White Mountains of New Hampshire (118). Drawing such connections among regions of the United States performs similar work to that done by the "Editorial Miscellany" in the July issue of the *Union* magazine, which I discuss at the conclusion of chapter 2. This

features he encounters in relation to international landscapes he has encountered. Taylor claims later that “New landscapes are often best described by comparison with others that are known” (123), and he resorts to such a tactic throughout *Colorado*—using the landscapes he came to know through his various travels through Europe and Asia. For example, in addition to a number of conventional comparisons between the Rockies and the Alps,³⁶ Taylor asserts that the Colorado parks “resemble, on a smaller scale, the lofty, mountain-bounded tablelands of Cashmere and Thibet” (89). Unlike Curtis, who uses comparisons to Europe to diminish the American landscape, Taylor employs this rhetoric to establish the grandeur of this American topography by writing it in terms of the Himalayan plateau. Indeed, Taylor goes on to remark how imperfectly other writers have represented the Rockies: “In fact, none of the accounts of travel among the Rocky Mountains seem to me to present their *individuality*, as mountains, very distinctly” (89). His remedy to this problem is to underscore the global stature of the Colorado Rockies. Their individuality—and thus their status as a source for national pride—can be confirmed by contrasting them with the world’s other natural wonders. Furthermore, by extending his points of reference beyond the typical European ones, Taylor suggests the international stature to be assumed by the United States in the postbellum years.

As Paul Wermuth points out, “The dominant note [in *Colorado*] is scenery, which [Taylor] looked at with a painter’s eye” (66). Beyond just crafting a faithful reproduction of the mountain scenery and noting its aesthetic appeal, though, Taylor infuses his

rhetorical move is extended by Helen Hunt Jackson in *Bits of Travel at Home*, which I discuss in the next chapter.

³⁶ It is worth noting, however, that Taylor recognizes that such comparisons only go so far. “With no less lofty chain can the Rocky Mountains be measured, it is true,” Taylor writes of the Alps, “but it is merely a general comparison of height, not of resemblance in any important feature” (162). Furthermore, unlike Curtis, Taylor resists seeing in these comparisons a sign that the American landscape is somehow inadequate or failed by European standards.

experience of that scenery with additional significance. Writing of beginning his adventure beyond the mining communities, Taylor describes the communion he feels not just with the natural world but with the social world as well: “The blood circulates with nimble alacrity; the lungs expand with a tingling sense of delight; all sights and sounds of Nature have a character of cheer and encouragement; life is a most agreeable condition, and one’s fellow-men are good fellows, every one of them” (79). Primarily a conventional romantic response to the natural world, this passage takes a curious turn at its conclusion. In concluding this sentence, Taylor calls attention to the *social bond* forged through the natural world. More importantly, however, Taylor’s insistent “every one of them” can be read in connection with the disagreeable conditions that frame the entire travel account—namely, the political aftermath of the Civil War. The fellowship Taylor describes here, underscored as it is in the text, expresses a hope for reconciliation. If, in Taylor’s thinking, farming and mining can reconstruct the economic ties that bind the nation together, he suggests that a closer connection to the natural world can reunite the social ties between Americans.

While such a reading of this passage might initially seem excessive, in another passage Taylor suggests the national implications of his Colorado experience. Having struggled his way up a difficult pass through the “snowy range” of the Rockies, Taylor is rewarded with the opportunity to stand upon “the backbone of the continent” (123). His view is “simple, sublime, and boundless,” taking in a circumference of one hundred miles and diversified by the craggy peak of Mount Lincoln and the green Arkansas River valley. Significantly, this “crowning grandeur” takes place on the Fourth of July. Taylor notes the date—almost in passing—after an extensive description of his prospect view.

“We celebrated the day with none but the most loyal and patriotic of sentiments,” he says, concluding with a pun that “There has been no loftier celebration this day in the United States” (124). Symbolically at the center of the nation on the date of its birth, Taylor understates the role this passage plays in the overall structure of his work. Although Taylor refrains from drawing an explicit moral from his summit experience, his language reveals the episode’s significance. The prospect scene emphasizes unity and continuity in the landscape:

Mount Lincoln, on the north, gathered together the white folds of the separating mountain ranges, and set his supreme pyramid over them; while far to the southeast, where the sage-plains of the South Park stretch for a hundred miles, all features were lost in a hot purple mist. Before us, however, lay the crowning grandeur. The ridge upon which we stood slid down, like the roof of a house, to the valley of the Upper Arkansas, which we could trace to the very fountain-head of the river. . . . (123)

On its own, this particular description would not likely be remarkable; considered in the context of the date and in the context of Taylor’s framing concerns about the Civil War, however, the passage carries extra resonance. Though Taylor describes the landscape here, that description carries a second, sociopolitical meaning that is hardly subtle. Investing Mount Lincoln with the power to gather together separating mountain ranges, and noting that the mountain presides over the northern end of the scene, Taylor constructs from his summit view a fantasy of national reconciliation arising out of nature.³⁷ The political “house divided” noted by President Lincoln is transformed into a topographical house united by the rooflike ridge of Mount Lincoln.

³⁷ Helen Hunt Jackson similarly describes the unifying power of Mount Lincoln in *Bits of Travel at Home*: “As we looked down on the narrow chains and into the closer chasms, it seemed as if this great giant pyramid on which we stood must hold, in some mysterious way, in its secret chambers, the threads of all the other ranges, as if they centred in it, radiated out from it, circled around it, in an intricate bond” (258).

This fantasy of national reunification culminates with Taylor's chapter "Colorado as a Summer Resort," in which he anticipates the territory's transformation into a kind of wilderness playground to be visited by the "better sort" and the "unappreciating" alike. The area, Taylor concludes, is "to become for us what Switzerland is to Europe" (161)—namely, a mountain resort for all classes of Americans to enjoy. While Taylor laments the inevitable presence of "ungrammatical mammas" and "the heaviest of fathers" (166), he suggests the transformative potential of Colorado. "No one of us," Taylor writes in "Glimpses of Nebraska," his final chapter,

will live to see the beauty and prosperity which these States, even in their rude, embryonic condition, already suggest. The American of to-day must find his enjoyment in anticipating the future. He must look beyond the unsightly beginnings of civilization, and prefigure the state of things a century hence, when the Republic will count a population of two hundred millions, and there shall be leisure for Taste and Art. We have now so much ground to occupy, and we make such haste to cover it, that our growth is—and must be—accompanied by very few durable landmarks. All is slight, shabby, and imperfect. Not until the greater part of our vacant territory is taken up, and there is a broad belt of settlement reaching from ocean to ocean, will our Western people begin to take root, consolidate their enterprise, and truly develop their unparalleled inheritance. (184)

This grand vision of the nation's progress relies on the rhetoric of the technological sublime and manifest destiny, imagining a beautiful, improved West. The "few durable landmarks" currently dotting the West, Taylor assures us, will be replaced by a tourist infrastructure that will bring the regions of the nation closer together just as it brings the nation closer to nature.

Paralleling his descriptions of the farming and mining regions, Taylor contends that all that is needed to effect such a transformation of Colorado and, thus, of the country, is commercial enterprise. He writes, "We shall, I hope, have Alpine clubs,

For Jackson, however, the unity that she sees in Mount Lincoln seems to be a unity in nature and not necessarily the political unity that Taylor suggests.

intelligent guides, good roads, bridges, and access to a thousand wonders yet unknown. It will be a national blessing when this region is opened to general travel” (166). When such tourist infrastructure can be constructed, it will enable greater access to the natural wonders of the Rockies—a transformation of the landscape that will engender another transformation in the level of culture of his nation. Such a result will be a “national blessing,” Taylor suggests, because the resulting communion with the natural world will ease the re-union of the social divide caused by the Civil War. Attracting Americans from every region, Colorado will thus become not just a destination for recreation but also a site for the re-creation of the nation.

With its reassertions of American nationalism in the aftermath of the Civil War, Taylor’s *Colorado* positions itself against the pre-War rhetoric of a text like Curtis’s *Lotus-Eating*. Whereas Curtis sees the American landscape as a diminished approximation of classic European scenery, Taylor figures the Colorado Rockies as clear proof of America’s emergence as a global commercial and cultural power, one whose natural resources stand on their own merits. Moreover, while Curtis suggests that the contact between individuals and nature is a nostalgic moment oriented toward the past, Taylor represents such interactions as powerful visions of the nation’s future. The Colorado landscape is not a reminder of a paradise lost but the sign of one being gained.

Even as we can contrast the perspectives developed by Curtis and Taylor, we can also connect those differing perspectives to the other works of domestic American travel literature I have discussed thus far. In responding to the scenic resorts of the eastern United States with a marked sense of dislocation and alienation, Curtis offers an extreme example of Irving’s disconnection from nature. Although Irving portrays his increasing

separation from the prairies, he nevertheless suggests that he has successfully reconnected with his American identity, even after such a long stay abroad. Curtis, by contrast, cannot escape—nor does he want to escape—his previous experiences of Europe, and thus his text becomes marked by a nostalgic yearning for that past. Similarly, we can recognize the continuities between Kirkland's *A New Home* and Taylor's *Colorado*, as both imagine versions of the nation based on a communal ethic arising out of individual connections to the American land itself. And while Thoreau offers a complicated celebration of a wild nature unsubdued by man, Taylor also recognizes the aesthetic and national value of such wilderness—even as he negotiates the emerging tourist apparatus that renders it a partly artificial landscape.

In their different ways, Curtis and Taylor link their explorations of the relationship between home and nature to issues of nationalism. In the next chapter, focusing on the works of Mark Twain and Helen Hunt Jackson, I turn my attention to authors whose representations of these interconnections revolve primarily around much more *personal* considerations, as both Twain and Jackson struggle to construct conceptions of home that will enable them to reconcile traumatic pasts. For Twain, that project remains one intensely focused on personal identity, while Jackson uses her personal experiences to imagine a link between personal, regional, and national identities.

CHAPTER 4

UNSETTLED NATURE, UNSETTLING HOME: DISLOCATION AND TRANSPLANTATION IN MARK TWAIN AND HELEN HUNT JACKSON

As I have shown, in his travel texts Henry David Thoreau questions the rigid distinctions between civilization and wilderness by exploring the ways in which “home is home, be it never so homely” (*Maine Woods* 385–86). Like Thoreau and the other authors I have discussed thus far in this dissertation, Mark Twain and Helen Hunt Jackson explore multiple possible versions of “home,” and their travel writings are marked by persistent attempts to reconstruct a sense of home in various new locations— attempts to make home *be* home, however alien it may initially seem. Despite this shared concern, Twain and Jackson differ radically in their attitudes toward such a project, and their difference resides largely in the fact that Twain imagines “home” as a discrete, static concept while Jackson conceives of it as fundamentally fluid. In this chapter, I analyze Twain’s *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi* and Jackson’s *Bits of Travel at Home* to argue that Twain ultimately resists the idea of home while Jackson, by contrast, insists upon it. Although both authors celebrate, to some degree, an ideal of perpetual travel, Twain sees such travel as a necessary escape from the domestic whereas Jackson conceives of it as a constant reinvention of her sense of home.

Whereas Thoreau represents his increasing ability to inhabit the wilderness as if it were home, Twain portrays his ultimate inability to make such an adaptation—for

Twain's nagging dilemma is that home is *never* home. *Roughing It* (1872) and *Life on the Mississippi* (1883) recount Twain's travel experiences as a young man in the western United States, and both texts center on Twain's evolving understanding of his relationships to the natural world and to the frontier communities he encounters. In some respects, in these texts Twain asks a version of the questions that Thoreau frantically asks in the Burnt Lands section of "Ktaadn": Who am I? Where am I? But unlike Thoreau, whose "contact" with nature bespeaks a heightened if still limited connection to the land as home, Twain's texts confirm a continuing sense of homelessness—or, as he puts it in the prefatory comment to *Roughing It*, of "variegated vagabondizing."

In her essay "Melodramas of Beset Manhood," Nina Baym contends that the American literary canon has been shaped around such narratives as Twain's that dramatize male characters in their flight from a constraining society. "In these stories," Baym writes, "the encroaching, constricting, destroying society is represented with particular urgency in the figure of one or more women" (12). While this reading describes *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* perfectly, in the two travel texts I discuss here, however, for Twain the destructive qualities of home are not its associations with a feminine, civilizing force, for many of the "homes" he constructs for himself are distinctly masculine environments. Rather, home is a reminder of a traumatic personal past that Twain tries to escape via narratives that emphasize his progression away from that past, largely through a focus on his increased professionalization as an author. In this way, Twain's *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi* remain *personal* texts to a degree unlike any of the other works I discuss in this dissertation, as he resists using his experiences as a foundation for thinking about the link between home and national

identity. Twain's refusal to engage such national questions in *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi* contrasts sharply with his work in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which enters very directly into the debates about race facing the United States during Reconstruction.

In contrast to Twain's vagabond sensibilities, Jackson reveals herself to be masterfully adaptive in *Bits of Travel at Home* (1878), a text that combines into one volume sketches about three separate areas of the United States. Like Twain, her travels have at their heart an early traumatic association with "home," but Jackson differs from Twain in that she transforms her intensely personal reactions to place into a subtly nationalist argument, one that connects herself to the various regions she visits even as it connects those regions to each other. As she moves among California, New England, and Colorado, Jackson detaches the concept of home from its ties to one particular place and represents her constant re-fashioning of her surroundings into a new home for herself. Whereas Twain insists on his continuing homelessness, Jackson asserts an ever-present sense of home, one often articulated through her relationship to the natural world but not dependent upon a singular location. In this way, *Bits of Travel at Home* can be seen as resisting the kind of imperialist appropriation sometimes attributed to regional writing. In her essay "Nation, Region, Empire," for example, Amy Kaplan contends that "Regionalists share with tourists and anthropologists the perspective of the modern urban outsider who projects onto the native a pristine authentic space immune to historical changes shaping their own lives" (252).¹ Drawing connections between herself, the land,

¹ In their book *Writing out of Place*, Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse argue against Kaplan's assertions that regionalism was "the agent that prepared readers for the U.S. move to empire." "Were regionalism in fact to have been as instrumental in empire building as Kaplan argues," they conclude, "we might

and the inhabitants of the places she visits, Jackson avoids such an appropriative perspective, for she traces her transition from outsider to insider and, in so doing, reveals the national commonalities that exist across regional difference. Her tactic is not to erase regional difference or to collapse it into national identity but to expose the interconnections between these mutually informing identities. She thus attaches a national significance to her experiences that Twain refuses to draw from his.

Juxtaposing Twain and Jackson in this way highlights not only their very different approaches to the problems of home and region and their potential roles in constructing national identity but also illustrates the connections between these authors and the authors of domestic American travel literature whom I have already discussed. Twain articulates on a deeply personal level the alienation and dislocation that were previously expressed by authors like Irving and Curtis. At the same time, however, Twain's ironic distance and comic self-criticism also differentiates his works from Curtis's *Lotus-Eating*, for even as Twain expresses his nostalgic yearning for an irretrievable past he also appears subtly critical of that perspective. Jackson's *Bits of Travel at Home* is likewise informed by the earlier texts I have addressed, as her sketches reveal the thematic concern with community that is so central to Kirkland's *A New Home*. In addition, her representation of the wildernesses of Colorado and California as home spaces certainly echo Thoreau, and her suggestion that the various regionalisms documented in her text comprise a vibrant nationalism recalls Taylor's similar suggestion in both the "Editorial Miscellany" of the *Union Magazine* and in *Colorado*.

legitimately expect to find it occupying a far more prominent place in our national literary history than it currently does or ever has" (228–29).

“We were homeless wanderers again”: Mark Twain’s Unsettled Nature
in *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi*

Twain’s *Roughing It* traces his acculturation to the mining cultures of Nevada and California, as he moves gradually through a series of occupations (and stages of unemployment) before taking the newspaper job that would eventually transform him into a professional author.² Each stage of Twain’s transformation is marked by his desire to appear at home in his new circumstances—to be a fully integrated part of his new surroundings, be they the wooded shores of Lake Tahoe or the silver mines of the Comstock lode. Jeffrey Steinbrink calls the text “a flight from civilization to conditions more . . . rudimentary” (qtd. in Messent 48), and Joseph Coulombe contends that “Twain viewed the West as a place of personal renewal” (53). Even as *Roughing It* reveals Twain’s successful professional development and in spite of its clear celebration of the mythic West, the text ultimately emphasizes Twain’s alienation from the world—social and natural—through which he passes. Peter Messent notes that *Roughing It* “focuses on the unresolved contradictions and multiplicities of the West” (46), and one of the central contradictions of Twain’s experience is his simultaneous urge to escape from home even as he tries to create one anew, to throw off the responsibilities of one form of work only to take up those of another.³ This central conflict finds its clearest expression in Twain’s complicated responses to the “curious new world” he encounters in the western United

² For more on the genesis of the text of *Roughing It*, see Gerber 39–42. In writing about Twain’s book, Gerber articulates the subtle bias often voiced against travel literature: “To call *Roughing It* a travel book . . . is to diminish it. For it is also a fictionalized autobiography, an extended tall story, a sketch book of people and places, and at least in the first half, a picaresque novel” (39).

³ The text’s title is, of course, ironic at least in part, for much of Twain’s concern throughout is to figure out an assortment of ways in which he can avoid “roughing it.” At the same time, though, Twain persistently returns to numerous forms of work. Jeffrey Alan Melton contends that Twain’s sole purpose in *Roughing It* is that of the tourist, pure leisure (see 99–100). But this view seems to disregard Twain’s own emphasis on his vocational development.

States. In analyzing *Roughing It*, I focus on Twain's attempts at homesteading on the shores of Lake Tahoe and his experiences as a silver prospector in the Nevada mines to show how Twain simultaneously desires and flees a sense of home he sees as preventing his professional growth.

Whereas *Roughing It* is unified by its focus on one excursion (albeit a seven-year long, geographically wide-ranging one), *Life on the Mississippi* is comprised of two separate travels: Twain's experiences as a cub steamboat pilot on the Mississippi River during his early adulthood and his 1882 return to the river as a tourist and passenger. Like *Roughing It*, *Life on the Mississippi* traces the development of a naïve Twain into a more mature figure, and focuses that development on his emergent understanding of a natural feature—here, the Mississippi River.⁴ Unlike the earlier text, *Life on the Mississippi* also features Twain revisiting the scene of his past experiences—in his return to the Mississippi and, more importantly, to his boyhood home of Hannibal, Missouri.⁵ Whereas *Roughing It* exposes Twain's inability to create a home in the West, *Life on the Mississippi* shows how what once was familiar terrain has become irretrievably alien to him. Together, the two texts reveal a pervasive sense of loss with which Twain can never quite come to terms. This *personal loss* coincides, however, with Twain's *professional gain*: that is, even as he narrates his geographical vagabondizing, he also narrates his increasing artistic and authorial sophistication.

⁴ There are numerous other similarities between *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi*. Although their respective topics—the mining rush of Nevada and California, and the height of steamboating on the Mississippi—do not directly intersect, both texts recount the “flush times” of particular western American subcultures. In both texts Twain is careful to call this fact to the attention of his reader, emphasizing the exceptional circumstances of each experience (see *Life* 63; *RI* 414, “Prefatory”).

⁵ *Roughing It* does feature one modest form of such a return, in Twain's comparison of traveling west by stagecoach and by train. To emphasize the differences between the two modes of transportation, Twain closes chapter 4 with an article from the *New York Times*. The article recounts a 300-mile journey by train that lasted 15 hours; by contrast, Twain notes that his stagecoach covered a similar distance in 56 hours.

The opening chapter of *Roughing It* explains the basis for the young Twain's westward travel and sets up several of the tensions that will develop throughout Twain's text: leisure versus work, romance versus reality, and western freedom versus home constraint.⁶ Noting his brother's recent appointment as secretary of the Nevada Territory, Twain admits, "I was young and ignorant, and I envied my brother" (49). Concerned less with the financial or professional benefits of his brother's new job than with the opportunity for adventure and exploration it affords, Twain speaks of his brother's assignment by adopting rhetoric often used to describe the sublime landscape. His brother's title lends "the great position an air of wild and imposing grandeur" (49), and "pen cannot describe" the feelings Twain has while imagining his brother's travels. Furthermore, when Twain is invited along on the journey, he is given "the sublime position of private secretary" (50). Twain's language of the sublime is, of course, ironic in its application to a government bureaucrat whose relationship to the western United States is defined not by its natural landscape but by its status as a political entity. Furthermore, this language is obviously that of the younger Twain, whom the narrating Twain represents as an exceedingly naïve greenhorn. Nevertheless, the excess of Twain's language underscores his focus on the western land and emphasizes his exalted view of travel—a view that originates in his comparative lack of experience: "I never had been away from home," Twain explains, "and that word 'travel' had a seductive charm for me"

⁶ There is a clear distinction between the character Twain and the narrator Twain. For ease of reference, however, I use "Twain" throughout my discussion; if the context does not provide an adequate sense of which Twain I am describing, I will use the longer "mature Twain" and "young Twain" to distinguish between the narrator and the character he constructs.

(49).⁷ Indeed, Twain is so seduced by travel that his “three-month pleasure excursion” lasts “six or seven uncommonly long years”; unlike Thoreau, who laments that “our expeditions are but tours” (“Walking” 593), Twain has the uncanny knack of transforming what was conceived as a short tour into a lengthy expedition. Although he initially intends to “see all I could that was new and strange, and then hurry home to business,” Twain instead extends his trip, partly to avoid returning home and partly to construct a new one for himself.

Much as Irving’s and Kirkland’s westward travels begin their respective “seasoning” processes, Twain’s journey west via the overland stage from St. Joseph begins his initiation into western life (*Roughing It* is full of such scenes of initiation). Discovering that the stage cannot accommodate all of his belongings, Twain is forced to condense his luggage and ship his trunk back to St. Louis. He must symbolically shed his eastern wardrobe in order to proceed further west. As Twain writes, “We were reduced to war footing. Each of us put on a rough, heavy suit of clothing, woolen army shirt and ‘stogy’ boots included” (52). Stripped of their “swallow-tail coats and white kid gloves,” Twain and his brother take on the simple, practical dress of westerners. Just as Kirkland must discard the superfluities that she has brought to Michigan, so too must Twain reform his identity in accord with his new surroundings. Although Twain feigns distress over this change of costume (comically worrying over what he will now wear to “Pawnee

⁷ Of course, the biographical Twain had been away from home before, for he had spent several years piloting steamboats on the Mississippi, as I will discuss in commenting upon *Life on the Mississippi*.

Twain’s romanticized view of travel is also evidenced by his lengthy hypothetical account of the “heroic” adventures to be had in the west, but this view is offset by his report of the steamboat passage between St. Louis and St. Joseph, which is “so dull, and sleepy, and eventless that it has left no more impression on my memory than if its duration had been six minutes instead of that many days” (50). Of course, given Twain’s knowledge of steamboating, his dismissal of the steamboat experience is interesting here. His familiarity with this form of travel renders it uninteresting to him.

receptions in the Rocky Mountains” [52]), he clearly welcomes it, for it signals a movement away from the constraint and refinement he associates with the eastern United States. The “rough, heavy suit” of clothing is ironically more liberating than his original lighter outfit.

Almost immediately after boarding the stage for Carson City, Twain expresses a new-found sense of freedom, one he distinctly links to his response to the passing Kansas landscape: “There was a freshness and breeziness, too, and an exhilarating sense of emancipation from all sorts of cares and responsibilities, that almost made us feel that the years we had spent in the close, hot city, toiling and slaving, had been wasted and thrown away” (54). Contrasting the “close, hot city” with the open expanse of the Kansas plains, Twain also links these two spaces to two separate activities: the city is the site of demanding, hard work while the natural world is the site of unrestrained pleasure and leisure. The west, as young Twain imagines it, is a place of radical freedom. Such a characterization of Kansas, of course, is complicated by the state’s role in the sectional tensions and expansion of slavery that led to the Civil War. Twain’s reference to the “emancipation” he feels on the prairies as compared to the “toiling and slaving” of the cities thus evokes the national history of slavery. Similar to Bayard Taylor’s reimagining of Kansas as a site of postwar national promise in *Colorado*, Twain resituates Kansas as a place of natural peace instead of recalling its role in national war. But unlike Taylor, who seeks to resolve the problem Kansas poses by directly addressing its history, Twain largely evades the national and political implications of his language by underscoring the state’s personal significance to him as emblematic of a freedom found in nature. Even as the issue erupts into his text, Twain silences it. This tactic is characteristic of Twain in

both *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi*, for he consistently refuses to link his own experiences or history to a larger national history.⁸ Instead, as I argue, Twain remains focused on the intensely personal aspects of his travel experiences.

Throughout *Roughing It*, Twain oscillates between a romantic reverence for the natural world and a realistic recognition of its failure to match his naïve preconceptions. Indeed, much of the book's humor depends on the ironic distance between the mature narrator and the inexperienced character he once was.⁹ On the one hand, the mature voice of the narrator mocks his earlier misperceptions, but on the other he laments the shattering of those pleasant illusions. This tension is perhaps most evident in Twain's account of crossing the alkali deserts outside of Salt Lake City, where his previous conception of the West is undermined by his experience. Having crossed similar deserts only at nighttime, Twain thrills at the prospect of crossing one during daylight. He is not only excited for the experience itself but also for the cultural capital it will afford him: this "was not an obscure, back country desert, but a very celebrated one, the metropolis itself," and Twain will now be able to "speak knowingly of deserts . . . thenceforward" (163). Twain continues rhapsodizing, "This was fine—novel—romantic—dramatically adventurous . . . worth traveling for! We would write home all about it" (163). This

⁸ In *Was Huck Black?*, Shelley Fisher Fishkin notes that "critics have ignored or obscured the African-American roots of [Twain's] art" (3) in demonstrating the powerful presence of "black" voices in Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. In calling attention to Twain's treatment of this passage, I do not intend to similarly obscure the presence of America's slavery past in Twain's narrative but to highlight the ways in which he dismisses such a political topic in favor of emphasizing its personal resonance. In contrast to his direct treatment of issues of race in *Huckleberry Finn*, his approach to the same issues in his travel works is evasive. And unlike Taylor's *Colorado*, where the issue recurs throughout the text, in Twain's two narratives, it arises only briefly in passing only to disappear entirely from consideration.

⁹ For an extended treatment of humor and persona in Twain's early texts, see Don Florence's book on the subject, in which he argues that Twain constructs "a variable, inclusive personality who uses the plasticity of humor to unsettle our notions of a fixed world" (16). In particular, Florence argues that in *Roughing It*, Twain "discovers for the first time how to control a comic narrative fully. . . . Through humor Twain molds the West into *his* world; he uses events rather than being used by them" (93).

sentence conveys two perspectives: that of the young Twain who sincerely feels this anticipation, and that of the narrating Twain who knows the “harsh” and “hateful reality” (164) that will follow. Twain values the natural world here primarily, if not entirely, for the status it can potentially confer on him: he will gather these experiences, see these sights, and aggrandize himself by writing home of them. (Despite his mockery of such a project, this is precisely what Twain does in writing *Roughing It*.) For beyond its immediate contribution to his cultural capital, the actual desert disappoints his romantic notions of it. As he admits, “The poetry was all in the anticipation—there is none in the reality” (163).

No longer the fresh and breezy environment of the Great Plains, nature as represented by the desert turns inhospitable and antagonistic toward man. Significantly, though, this hostile nature is described in terms Twain has applied to his home and to the east. Although Twain’s labeling of the desert as “the metropolis itself” initially appears to have no real negative connotations (indeed, he uses the phrase ironically as a *positive* label), it soon becomes clear that crossing the desert mimics the kind of work Twain associates with the city. Twain writes of the “aching monotony of toiling” (163) and complains that the wagon “was so hot! and so close!” (164) during their passage—language that evokes the precise conditions from which he was so excited to have freed himself. In some ways, the West is simply a repetition of the home he fled. Much like Washington Irving’s fear of alienation upon returning to the United States, Twain’s sense of home and homelessness is in some ways an expression of Sigmund Freud’s notion of the *unheimlich* or the uncanny. Describing the uncanny as something that is long known but made alien through a process of repression (142), Freud contends that it often

manifests itself through repetition. The term's etymology (*unheimlich*, un-home-ly/-like) links it with ideas of home and the foreign. Both an object of desire and a place of alienation, home for Twain becomes a place both perpetually sought and avoided.

The grandeur Twain has expected from Nevada is replaced by an overriding sense of desolation, which is reinforced once he and his brother arrive in Carson City. "Visibly our new home was a desert, walled in by barren, snow-clad mountains" (177), Twain writes. Situated on the verge of an ashen wasteland littered with the decaying carcasses of various animals, Carson City has an otherworldly appearance. From a distance, it looks "like an assemblage of mere white spots in the shadow of a grim range of mountains overlooking it, whose summits seemed lifted clear out of companionship and consciousness of earthly things" (178). Clearly, Twain is not in Kansas anymore. The liberating, inspiring relationship to the natural world Twain felt there is displaced by one marked by harshness and alienation. Here, the sublime becomes for Twain not a sign of his connection to nature, as it was for Thoreau to a certain degree, but a sign of his separation from it.

As happens throughout *Roughing It*, however, Twain's disappointment does not last long. Richard Bridgman aptly calls the "central mood" of the text "optimistically comic" (31), and Twain characteristically follows up such a setback with a renewal of his optimism. While the text is in some respects a linear tale of development and growth,¹⁰ Twain's relationship to the natural world follows no such path of progression. Rather, like Thoreau before him, Twain treats nature in its various manifestations, acknowledging his diverse responses to it. As Joseph Coulombe notes of Twain, "Rather

¹⁰ In the broadest terms, *Roughing It* traces the route by which the young Twain matures into the narrating Twain—albeit in fits and starts, with many digressions along the way.

than view nature as entirely positive and purifying, he often depicted [nature] as threatening, dangerous, even depraved” (116). But it is important to note that such negative depictions of nature as the alkali desert ultimately coexist with such portraits as the Kansas prairies—and that Twain does not narrate a story in which an innocent, harmonious nature is revealed to be only a bleak wasteland. Rather, nature is *both* bleak and beautiful, constricting and liberating—and it is through his encounters with such different incarnations of nature that Twain portrays his inability to inhabit *any* of them.

Twain’s first attempt at building a home in the West is his homesteading experiment on the shores of Lake Tahoe. Occurring soon after Twain’s arrival in Carson City and his subsequent decision to postpone hurrying home to business because he has become “well accustomed” to his new situation, the episode recounts how Twain and his companion Johnny (a young Ohioan seeking recreation in the West) set out from Carson City “to take up a wood ranch or so ourselves and become wealthy” (186–87). Although the announced aim of Twain’s visit is thus commercial and not recreational, based on a material rather than an aesthetic view of nature, Twain focuses on his relation to nature more fully here than anywhere else in *Roughing It*. This focus is evident in Twain’s description of his first sighting of the lake, where he represents nature in its most idyllic form and emphasizes the grandiose scale of Tahoe’s environment:

We plodded on, two or three hours longer, and at last the Lake burst upon us—a noble sheet of blue water lifted six thousand three hundred feet about the level of the sea, and walled in by a rim of snow-clad mountain peaks that towered aloft full three thousand feet higher still! It was a vast oval, and one would have to use up eighty or a hundred good miles in traveling around it. As it lay there with the shadows of the mountains brilliantly photographed upon its still surface I thought it must surely be the fairest picture the whole earth affords. (187)

This “fairest picture” clearly contrasts with Twain’s first sight of Carson City. The pictures are structurally similar, with the foreground “walled in” by the “snow-clad mountains” in the background, and Twain employs similar language in developing both pictures. But whereas the Carson City scene suggests a nature that is grim and barren, Lake Tahoe’s environment is noble, fair, and refreshing—it is a “delicious solitude” and “solemn hush” that affects Twain like a “wholesome medicine” (188).¹¹

In addition to his evident aesthetic appreciation of and physical response to the Lake Tahoe area, however, Twain intends to establish a property claim on the area.¹² Despite his desire to become wealthy, Twain can never bring himself to carry his original plans through to their conclusion, and his timber ranch clearly parodies the idea of land ownership. For the land claim to be legal, the property must be fenced off and have a house built upon it. Twain nevertheless makes it clear that he aims at the minimum requirement: “That is to say, it was necessary to cut trees here and there and make them fall in such a way as to form a sort of enclosure (with pretty wide gaps in it)” (189). Twain and Johnny manage to cut down a total of six trees before abandoning their fence and turning their attention to their house, which is similarly scaled down from a “substantial log-house” to a mere brush house. Like the fence, the house is a “half-way

¹¹ Twain’s characterization of nature as a “wholesome medicine” recalls Thoreau’s idea of the “tonic of wildness,” and Twain’s response to Lake Tahoe echoes Thoreau’s assertion about the necessity of nature in *Walden*. “Our village life would stagnate if it were not for the unexplored forests and meadows which surround it,” Thoreau writes. “We need the tonic of wildness,—to wade sometimes in marshes where the bittern and the meadow-hen lurk, and hear the booming of the snipe; to smell the whispering sedge where only some wilder and more solitary fowl builds her nest, and the mink crawls with its belly close to the ground” (557). For Twain, lounging on the Lake Tahoe shore, smoking his pipe and playing chess, is his closest approximation to wading in Thoreauvian marshes. This leisure ethic also anticipates moments in *Huckleberry Finn*, where Huck relaxes on the raft as it floats downriver.

¹² See Scott Michaelsen’s “*Roughing It* Under the Shadow of the Corporation” for more on the links between *Roughing It* and capitalism. Peter Messent similarly notes that “No space exists beyond business and the marketplace in the West that Twain describes” (58). While issues of work and property figure in my discussion of Twain’s text, I treat them primarily as aspects of Twain’s connection to place.

sort of affair” that so resembles its surroundings that “if both turned our backs we might not be able to find it again” (190).¹³ Despite his meager efforts to claim the area as property, Twain assumes the title of “land owner” and announces his satisfaction with the new home that he and Johnny have constructed. Ironically, Twain ends up constructing a hut somewhat along the lines of Thoreau’s minimalist home at Walden Pond but for strikingly different reasons. In contrast to Thoreau’s purposeful minimizing of the distinctions between the domestic and the wild, Twain links civilization and nature primarily by way of his comical laziness and lack of focus. In so doing, he satirizes the notion of being “at home” in the wilderness through the sheer absurdity of his self-portrayal.

Although Twain clearly mocks the legal requirements for homesteading, revels in his own absurd inability to devote sufficient effort to realizing his goals, and questions the connection between home and nature, he also clearly celebrates the simple, leisurely life he is able to lead on the shores of Lake Tahoe. As he writes at the beginning of chapter 23, “If there is any life that is happier than the life we led on our timber ranch for the next two or three weeks, it must be a sort of life which I have not read of in books or experienced in person” (191).¹⁴ The happiness of that life arises partly out of Twain’s taste for idleness and partly out of his (romantic) communion with nature here. Twain idealizes the experience of sleeping “[n]ot under a roof, but under the sky” (188), admitting that the brush house was built merely to secure their property claim and not to

¹³ Peter Messent suggests that the Lake Tahoe episode highlights “the impossibility of separating out wilderness world from historical event” (59), as commercial enterprise is an inescapable presence in this western landscape. While Messent certainly has a valid point about the mediated status of nature here, as I argue below, it is important nevertheless that Twain places such a value on nature here and not simply on commerce.

¹⁴ Twain’s insistence on calling this land his “timber ranch” underscores the joy the mature narrator takes in representing the comedy-of-errors that was his time at Lake Tahoe.

provide any functional shelter. Twain details the day-to-day leisure activities he and Johnny pursue while at Lake Tahoe, from smoking pipes on the beach, to fishing for trout in the lake, to watching the advancing light of the rising sun (191–93). In each of these pursuits, Twain admits, he “superintends” while Johnny does the actual work—“not because I mind exertion myself,” he explains of his refusal to row their boat on the lake, “but because it makes me sick to ride backwards when I am at work” (187). Twain’s leisure ethic enables him to enjoy his natural surroundings even further, and the “business” of his timber ranch comes to mean “drifting around in the boat” (192).¹⁵

As idyllic as the Lake Tahoe episode is, however, Twain’s appreciation of the region ultimately remains commercial rather than aesthetic: despite his various expressions of admiration for the scenery surrounding him, Twain’s experiences as a landowner do not alter his perception of the land as pure “property.” Instead, nature remains a distant object, a picture to be observed or written about—something primarily to be used for monetary or authorial gain. This somewhat surprising turn emerges most clearly in Twain’s accidental but total destruction of the forest. After gathering (that is, stealing) supplies for their ranch from a nearby camp, Twain and Johnny return home near nightfall. As Johnny unloads the boat, Twain lights a campfire in order to cook dinner—and leaves the fire unattended for a minute, only to look up and see that it “was galloping all over the premises” (194). The fire quickly consumes the surrounding forest, and Twain remains a “spell-bound” spectator throughout the inferno, appreciating the fire on an aesthetic level: “Every feature of the spectacle was repeated in the glowing mirror of the lake! Both pictures were sublime, both were beautiful; but that in the lake had a

¹⁵ Twain’s description here of his time at Lake Tahoe resembles his descriptions of Huck and Jim’s Mississippi River idyll in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

bewildering richness about it that enchanted the eye and held it with the stronger fascination” (195). Where Twain once saw beauty in the natural environment surrounding Tahoe, he now sees beauty in that environment’s wholesale destruction. Twain watches as his “happy life” goes up in smoke, but he watches with a detached, disinterested air about him.¹⁶

Twain’s assessment of the fire’s impact is telling, for it focuses the reader’s attention on what he has lost and avoids acknowledging any responsibility for causing the conflagration: “We were homeless wanderers again, without any property. Our fence was gone, our house burned down; no insurance. Our pine forest was well scorched, the dead trees all burned up, and our broad acres of manzanita swept away” (195). The repeated “our” here insists on Twain’s property claim even as it no longer exists, and he includes within this claim the entire pine forest. Twain’s concern, however, is less focused on the loss of this particular place than on the loss of his “property,” broadly defined. Homeless again, Twain simply packs up what he has left and returns to Carson City—and, as he admits at the beginning of the next chapter, he sets his sights on a different form of property, a horse.

As the Lake Tahoe episode shows, Twain attempts to construct a new home in nature only to undermine and satirize that very effort. Idyllic and happy as this life is for

¹⁶ Two scenes from *Walden* can be compared to this scene. First, in “Housewarming,” Thoreau recounts how he accidentally set fire to his bed by leaving the blaze in his fireplace unattended “three or four hours.” In his absence, a spark from the fire “had burned a place as big as my hand” (497). Shortly after recounting this episode, Thoreau describes in the “Former Inhabitants and Winter Visitors” chapter watching helplessly as Breed’s hut burns down. Thoreau and his companion “concluded to let it burn, it was so far gone and so worthless,” but use the occasion to discuss “the great conflagrations which the world has witnessed” (503). Twain is obviously comically rewriting these scenes through the quickness with which his campfire ignites the Tahoe woods and his empty response to the scene. In addition, in his *Journals*, Thoreau describes his accidentally setting fire to the Walden woods, though that did not happen during his residence there.

him, Twain is finally not very concerned about its sudden end, nor does he try to rebuild the way of life he had enjoyed so briefly. Twain is a homeless wanderer not only in the sense that he has lost the actual structure of his brush house but also in the sense that he continues to be unable to feel connected to *any* of the places he lives. The episodic nature of *Roughing It* underscores this sense of dislocation: Twain simply moves on in search of additional amusement, with little indication that these events have significantly affected him or the areas through which he passes. In this way, Twain's text expresses precisely the type of touristic, appropriative attitude that Amy Kaplan has claimed marks regionalism's complicity in an imperial ethos.¹⁷ Moreover, Twain's detachment provides a crucial counterpoint to the type of regionalism cultivated by Helen Hunt Jackson, which I discuss in the second half of this chapter.

After his dreams of a lucrative timber ranch go up in flames, Twain turns to another distinctively western pursuit: prospecting for precious metals in the mining districts of Nevada. "By and by," he explains at the beginning of chapter 26, "I was smitten with the silver fever" (210). Twain's Nevada mining experiences follow the pattern established by the Lake Tahoe episode: a series of half-hearted efforts geared toward realizing an ecstatic promise of riches, only to have those dreams deflated by his comic incompetence and sheer laziness. Moreover, as his mining efforts reveal, Twain never moves beyond seeing nature primarily as a commodity, for he constantly reads the landscape in terms of narrow self-interest. This situation highlights the problem feeling at home in nature poses for Twain, for he does not leave behind a concept of "home" that

¹⁷ While I limit my focus here to Twain's travel in the continental United States, the chapters in *Roughing It* that detail his trip to the Sandwich Islands can be read as extending precisely this type of imperial voyeurism that remains distanced from its subjects even as it represents them for readers.

relies on conceiving nature as property to be possessed and used by an individual. Much like his devotion to developing his timber ranch, Twain's immersion in the mining culture remains tenuous at best, for his vagabond impulse ultimately trumps any inclination to remain in one place. The events he describes, even as they propel him toward a career in writing, at the same time seem to leave small lasting impressions on Twain as a character. He can thus become intimately acquainted with life in the silver mines, yet nevertheless maintain a critical distance from that life—a detachment from place that Twain alternatively resists and insists upon.

Although Twain's goal in following his silver fever is “to gather up, in a day or two, or at furthest a week or two, silver enough to make me satisfactorily wealthy” (221), he is almost always distracted from that focus by other pursuits, particularly by opportunities for recreation in the outdoors. As Twain and three companions make their way to Humboldt County in northern Nevada, Twain revels in the journey itself. “It is a kind of life that has a potent charm for all men, whether city or country-bred,” he writes of their trip, despite its difficulties. “We are descended from desert-lounging Arabs, and countless ages of growth toward perfect civilization have failed to root out of us the nomadic instinct. We all confess to a gratified thrill at the thought of ‘camping out’” (218). Acknowledging that the trip was “a hard, wearing, toilsome journey,” Twain nevertheless seizes on its “bright side” (218), celebrating the freedom from care and responsibility his travels allow him to enjoy. He thus casts the two-hundred-mile journey from Carson City to Humboldt not as a means to the end he desires but as an end in itself: this camping out business is fun stuff, a pleasant diversion from the more rigorous demands of the business of mining. Indeed, when Twain and his companions must abort

their search for a mysterious cement mine said to be hidden somewhere in the Sierra Nevada, they opt to “make the best of [their] misfortune and enjoy a week’s holiday on the borders of the curious Lake [Mono]” (273). At the end of that week, Twain explains, ironically using language better suited to business than to recreation, the men “*adjourned* to the Sierras on a fishing excursion” (283; my emphasis).¹⁸ Such perpetual vacationing underscores Twain’s desire not only to avoid working but also to avoid becoming too deeply attached to any particular area—the West remains a space through which Twain moves but not a place to which he might move.

Even the approach Twain and his companions take to mining typifies Twain’s penchant for avoiding work, as he hopes once again that merely claiming property will result in wealth without requiring any further action. Repeating the leisurely attitude that characterizes his homesteading efforts at Lake Tahoe, Twain places great emphasis on avoiding work during his mining ventures in both Humboldt and Esmeralda Counties. Having discovered in Humboldt that the “real success of silver mining” (231) lies not in working the mines himself but in selling his property claims to others who are willing to work the mines, Twain puts this philosophy to use in Esmeralda:

We took up various claims, and commenced shafts and tunnels on them, but never finished any of them. We had to do a certain amount of work on each to “hold” it, else other parties could seize our property after the expiration of ten days. We were always hunting up new claims and doing a little work on them and then waiting for a buyer—who never came. (260)

Clearly, these unfinished mines parallel Twain’s unfinished timber ranch. Twain once again aims to fulfill the minimum requirement, and in this passage, he underscores his passivity as he waits for a buyer who never appears. The mature Twain is clearly using

¹⁸ For more on Twain’s time exploring Mono Lake and living in the surrounding mining camps, see *Mark Twain: His Adventures at Aurora and Mono Lake* by George Williams III.

his previous naïveté as comic fodder, and the young Twain's failure to do sufficient work on one of his mines becomes the crucial misstep in an episode in which he and his partners lose possession of a mine that would have made them millionaires.

In what Twain labels "the most curious" episode of his "slothful, valueless, heedless career" (285), Twain and his partner Higbie discover that a local mine thought to be rich is actually based on a "blind lead." Realizing that the rich vein of rock was different from the ledge claimed by the Wide West Company and thus was public property, Higbie and Twain, with the help of a third partner, claim the blind lead as their own and register it with the local recorder. The move makes the men among the richest in Esmeralda—in theory, at least. Twain immediately begins to fantasize about this newfound wealth, and his first visions are of transforming his residence: "The floorless, tumble-down cabin was a palace, the ragged gray blankets silk, the furniture rosewood and mahogany" (289). Flush with the excitement of their apparent wealth, Twain and Higbie discuss building new houses for themselves in the Russian Hill section of San Francisco. Scoffing at Higbie's idea of building a brick house, Twain elaborates on his ideal home: "Brown stone front—French plate glass—billiard-room off the dining-room—statuary and paintings—shrubbery and two-acre grass plat—greenhouse—iron dog on the front stoop—gray horses—landau, and a coachman with a bug on his hat!" (290). While these details, culminating with the absurdly minute image of a coachman with a bug on his hat, are obviously intended to be comically grandiose, the focus on the domestic signals Twain's persisting concern with the idea of home. Although he goes to Humboldt and Esmeralda, in part, to escape the "stand-still and settling down to a humdrum existence" (177) characterized by life in Carson City, Twain imagines precisely

such a settling down with his new fortune. As with his homestead on Lake Tahoe, however, Twain builds such houses only to burn them down or to flee them. As quickly as he details the rich furnishings of his estate-to-be in San Francisco, Twain moves away from that home: “Cal.,” he asks his partner, “when are you going to Europe?” (290). For his part, Twain proclaims, he will spend not simply one summer but three years abroad. Such a fantasy of travel repeats Twain’s previous escapist desires and negates the stasis that would be imposed by his imagined home.

The blind lead episode is perhaps the central moment of *Roughing It*. In many ways, it crystallizes the themes of work, travel, and home that figure throughout the text. Twain inscribes his book “To Calvin H. Higbie, of California, An Honest Man, a Genial Comrade, and a Steadfast Friend, This Book Is Inscribed By the Author, In Memory of the Curious Time When We Two Were Millionaires For Ten Days” (n.p.), thus positioning the blind lead episode as a critical point in the book. Indeed, although *Roughing It* does not possess a particularly compact plot, the episode *is* a pivotal one. The deflation of Twain’s grandiose dreams of wealth because of his persistent flight from work pushes him to consider where exactly his “variegated vagabondizing” is taking him—not just geographically but also professionally. At the beginning of chapter 42, immediately after the blind lead episode, he asks himself “What to do next?” (300). In terms of how the mature Twain structures the text of *Roughing It*, then, the blind lead episode blindly leads him into his journalism career, as chapter 42 recounts his unexpected offer to become the city editor for the Virginia City *Daily Territorial Enterprise*. While Twain’s wandering through the Sierra Nevada, alternately mining and

vacationing, does not entirely settle his nomadic urge, it *does* settle him into a career of writing.¹⁹ His heedless career of odd jobs at an end, Twain admits, “I felt that I had found my legitimate occupation at last” (305).

Although Twain’s discovery of journalism and writing solves his concerns about work, his relationship to place remains a vexed one. “I began to get tired of staying in one place so long” (398), he later admits. For Twain, staying in one place becomes equated with personal stagnation, and while he repeatedly expresses the desire to construct for himself various homes, he also repeatedly thwarts that very desire by continuing to wander. Twain’s attitude is quite similar to Huck’s sentiment at the end of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*: “But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she’s going to adopt me and sivilize me and I can’t stand it. I been there before” (263). In *Roughing It*, Twain, too, has been there before, and he can’t stand it either—except here he is not fleeing a civilizing Aunt Sally but a connection to place that Twain sees as threatening his professional development. As the Lake Tahoe and blind lead episodes reveal, Twain consistently represents himself as distanced from the experiences that bring him closest to developing a sense of home in the West. That distance, of course, is a necessary strategy for Twain’s humor, but it also underscores a gap between Twain and the places he passes through, one that takes on an additional layer in *Life on the Mississippi*, when Twain revisits his childhood home of Hannibal, Missouri.

¹⁹ For more on Twain’s “autobiographies of authorship,” see Richard S. Lowry’s “*Littery Man*”: *Mark Twain and Modern Authorship*. Lowry devotes only a brief discussion to *Roughing It*, arguing that Twain’s role as a reporter becomes another form of prospecting, inextricably linked to one another in a speculative economy (72–73). For more on Twain’s time in Virginia City, see George Williams III’s *Mark Twain: His Life in Virginia City, Nevada*.

Like *Roughing It*, *Life on the Mississippi* is deeply concerned with tracing Twain's emerging identification with a specific American subculture, one defined crucially (though certainly not solely) through its relationship with the natural world. In addition, like the exuberant mining camps of the silver rush, Twain characterizes the "flush times of steamboating" on the Mississippi and the "marvellous science of piloting" used to navigate the river as unique instances in the history of the world. "I believe there has been nothing like it elsewhere in the world" (*Life* 63), Twain writes, thus asserting the exceptionalism of his subject matter. Constructed from a complex weave of Twain's autobiographical reflections and his fictional inventions, *Life on the Mississippi* is also a complex weave of two separate writing occasions, for it incorporates Twain's earlier "Old Times on the Mississippi" (published serially in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1875) into a larger account of Twain's experiences on and along the Mississippi River.²⁰ The first half of *Life on the Mississippi* focuses on the young Twain's apprenticeship as a cub pilot and culminates in his becoming a "full fledged" steamboat pilot (166). The latter part of the book consists of Twain's return to the river twenty-one years later, and his realization that the unique world of steamboating he once knew so well has nearly disappeared. By examining the relationship between these two narrative strands in Twain's *Life on the Mississippi*, I argue that the text builds upon the dislocation Twain expresses in *Roughing It* by emphasizing his irremediable alienation from his actual childhood home.

Twain's account of his beginnings as a cub pilot are marked by his perspective as a naïve, romantic youth. Much as he does at the outset of *Roughing It*, the young Twain idealizes travel (while the mature Twain's narrative voice satirizes such notions): "I

²⁰ The book-length *Life on the Mississippi* was not conceived until late 1881. Chapters 4–17 of *Life* were taken from "Old Times," with few alterations.

became a new being. . . . I was a traveller! A word never had tasted so good in my mouth before. I had an exultant sense of being bound for mysterious lands and distant climes which I never have felt in so uplifting a degree since” (68). Initially intending to make his way from the United States to the Amazon region of South America, where he dreams of assisting in the exploration of that river, the young Twain eventually finds himself stranded in New Orleans and needing to “contrive a new career” (72), a situation that mirrors his dilemma in *Roughing It* after the blind lead episode. Abandoning his aspirations of becoming an adventurer, Twain convinces Horace Bixby, the pilot of the boat that carried Twain to New Orleans, to take him on as a cub pilot and to “teach [him] the Mississippi River from New Orleans to St. Louis” (72). This vocational turn, however, does not signal a failure of Twain’s romantic expectations. Instead, as Twain carefully establishes, the position of steamboat pilot was regarded with awe by the boys of his riverfront hometown: it was “the grandest position of all” (67), Twain asserts, both for its “princely salary” and the social status it conferred.²¹ Twain thus recovers the romance he otherwise would have lost.

As in *Roughing It* and in similar passages from Irving’s *A Tour* or Kirkland’s *A New Home*, Twain’s experiences immediately challenge his innocent, romanticized perspective. Whereas Twain’s early disappointment in *Roughing It* emerges from his response to the western landscape (such as crossing the alkali desert), his disillusionment in *Life* first centers on the drudgery of working as a cub pilot—precisely the kind of toiling he had sought to avoid in the earlier text. Awakened at midnight of his first day under Bixby’s tutelage, the young Twain is stupefied to find that he is expected to quit

²¹ Although he does not use the language of the sublime here, this language recalls Twain’s descriptions of his brother’s job in *Roughing It*, constructing piloting as an exalted occupation.

the comfort of his warm bed and return to the pilot house to assist in steering the ship. “Here was something fresh—this thing of getting up in the middle of the night to go to work. It was a detail in piloting that had never occurred to me at all. . . . I began to fear that piloting was not quite so romantic as I had imagined it was; there was something very real and work-like about this new phase of it” (74). The shifts in perspective here—from romance to reality, from leisure to work—recall the core tensions in *Roughing It*. Just as the larger structure of *Roughing It* traces Twain’s persistent flight from work before he discovers the craft of writing, in *Life on the Mississippi* Twain slowly reconciles himself to the work of piloting. Indeed, part of his aim in “deal[ing] so minutely with piloting as a science” is to show “in the most patient and painstaking way, what a wonderful science it is” (97).²² Although piloting is now somewhat demystified for the young Twain (no longer the “princely” enterprise his imagination had led him to conceive), it remains a source of intellectual and physical challenge for him.

That challenge primarily revolves around Twain’s evolving relationship to the Mississippi River itself, which he figures as a text that must be read and interpreted for its meanings. Initially, however, Twain is incapable of successfully reading the river. “Now I had often seen pilots gazing at the water and pretending to read it as if it were a book,” Twain writes, “but it was a book that told me nothing” (91). Under Horace Bixby’s guidance (which often involves, for Twain, numerous and continued “perplexities”),

²² Contrary to the ironic and satiric voice that runs through *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi*, here the mature Twain appears sincere in asserting that piloting was a “wonderful science.” Such a reading is reinforced by Twain’s evident dismay at the demise of steamboating in the late 1870s and early 1880s.

Twain slowly achieves a readerly command of his text.²³ Twain describes his

breakthrough with evident excitement:

The face of the water, in time, became a wonderful book—a book that was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice. And it was not a book to be read once and thrown aside, for it had a new story to tell every day. . . . There never was so wonderful a book written by man; never one whose interest was so absorbing, so unflagging, so sparkingly renewed with every re-perusal. (94)

Successfully reading the river allows Twain not only to distinguish himself from the

“uneducated passenger” but also to enter the select society of steamboat pilots. Whereas

those unschooled passengers would see “nothing but all manner of pretty pictures”

expressed on the river’s surface, the “trained eye” of the pilot—and of Twain himself—

would recognize “the grimmest and most dead-earnest of reading-matter” (95).

Membership in that society, in turn, depends upon Twain’s intimacy with the nature of

the river. It is telling, then, that Twain figures his reading of the river as a private

exchange of “cherished secrets” and that he casts the Mississippi as a close acquaintance.

While Joseph Coulombe contends that Twain “accepted the adversarial relationship

between himself (as a steamboat pilot) and the river” (121), it is important to note that

Twain’s description of nature here is not adversarial at all. Furthermore, Twain effaces

his own agency in describing his communication with the natural world. Rather than

actively reading the river and interpreting its signs, Twain emphasizes the river’s

²³ I might add here, too, that Twain’s travel text functions similarly for the reader: in celebrating this “wonderful science” of piloting, Twain vicariously initiates his reader into the piloting profession. Similar to Kirkland’s writing of her audience into the community of Montacute, Twain’s detailing of life on the Mississippi invites a readerly experience of that community, albeit mediated through language and the act of reading.

openness toward him; it tells its “mind” to him “without reserve,” “as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice.”²⁴ Twain thereby underscores the harmony that now exists between himself and the river.

This correspondence between Twain and the Mississippi rests on the author’s detailed personification of nature, but Twain insists still on a fundamental difference between the natural world and humankind. “There never was so wonderful a book written by man,” he writes, exulting in the ever-changing significances of the river and reasserting nature’s consequent superiority to human texts.²⁵ Furthermore, while learning to read the river is crucial for Twain’s development as a cub pilot, and while it signals Twain’s establishment of a close link to nature, it is not without a very palpable cost. Summing up his newly acquired mastery of the “language of this water,” Twain admits, “I had made a valuable acquisition. But I had lost something, too. I had lost something which could never be restored to me while I lived. All the grace, the beauty, the poetry had gone out of the river” (95). The aesthetic appeal of the river, like the romance of piloting, has been displaced by Twain’s practical knowledge of what the river’s appearances *mean*. Twain insists upon this point by contrasting his innocent response to a sunset on the river during his first days of steamboating with his experienced interpretation of that same sunset. The richly descriptive passage and flood of images recede before Twain’s matter-of-fact assessment of what such a sunset would have signified to him as a pilot. Having to some degree demystified the Mississippi, Twain is

²⁴ While Twain has earlier admitted the hard work that went into his breakthrough achievement, he erases all traces of the labor he had to exert in order to reach this culminating moment.

²⁵ Twain echoes Thoreau here, who opens the “Sounds” chapter of *Walden* by remarking the need to attend to the language of nature: “But while we are confined to books, though the most select and classic, and read only particular written languages, which are themselves but dialects and provincial, we are in danger of forgetting the language which all things and events speak without metaphor, which alone is copious and standard” (363).

left with a deep sense of loss—a loss that, as he says, is permanent—and a nostalgic yearning for his lost innocence. Liking his situation to that of doctor who learns to detect sickness in the appearances of his patients, Twain asks, “And doesn’t he sometimes wonder whether he has gained most or lost most by learning his trade?” (96). Twain’s answer to this question, it seems, can be located not just in his account of his learning the trade of steamboat piloting but also in the professional career that follows, and builds on, that earlier experience—a career that includes Twain’s return to the river in 1882 as a now-recognizable author.

This tension between gain and loss is clearly expressed in Twain’s treatment of the accidental death of his brother, Henry, in a steamboat explosion, and its relationship to his developing career.²⁶ This chapter of *Life on the Mississippi*, entitled “A Catastrophe,” is positioned at a crucial point in the narrative, for it immediately follows the event that Twain figures as his “emancipation” and immediately precedes Twain’s sudden revelation that he has received his piloting license. Twain’s treatment of these events underscores his emerging alienation from both piloting and his own past, particularly since this episode concludes Twain’s account of his piloting apprenticeship. Working aboard the same steamboat as an unlikable pilot named Brown,²⁷ Twain must

²⁶ Interestingly, another explosion figures in the sequence of chapters in *Roughing It* that lead to Twain’s decision to become a journalist. Just before recounting the blind lead episode and the events that followed, Twain recalls an incident where a stove exploded a cache of gunpowder and “came so near ‘instigating’ my funeral” (283). Moreover, Twain titles chapter 24 of *Life on the Mississippi*, which recounts his failed attempt to pass as merely a passenger and not an ex-pilot, “My Incognito is Exploded.”

²⁷ “Unlikable” may be an understatement here, for Twain confesses a homicidal—if humorous—urge toward Brown. “I often wanted to kill Brown,” Twain writes, “but this would not answer. A cub had to take everything his boss gave, in the way of vigorous comment and criticism; and we all believed that there was a United States law making it a penitentiary offence to strike or threaten a pilot who was on duty. However, I could *imagine* myself killing Brown . . .” (155). As the next chapter of *Life* demonstrates, Twain is ultimately able to act on his dislike for Brown—and if Twain does not kill Brown, the conflict between the two does ultimately result in Brown’s death during the *Pennsylvania* catastrophe that also kills Twain’s brother Henry.

defend his younger brother from the angry pilot. A confrontation between the two, in which Henry and Brown accuse each other of lying to the captain about why the boat missed a landing, concludes with the young Twain's correction of the pilot: "You lie, yourself. He did tell you" (158). Enraged, Brown orders Henry out of the pilot house and promises to "attend to [Twain's] case in a half a minute." Twain describes the pivotal scene that follows: "It was pilot law, and must be obeyed. The boy started out, and even had his foot on the upper step outside the door, when Brown, with a sudden access of fury, picked up a ten-pound lump of coal and sprang after him; but I was between, with a heavy stool, and I hit Brown a good honest blow which stretched him out" (158). Twain's "honest blow" corrects Brown's lies and defends Henry's safety; but more importantly, Twain's action here, which he labels "the crime of crimes," asserts his independence from Brown. It is both a physical and a verbal liberation for Twain, for after he "pound[s] him with my fists a considerable time" he remains in the pilot house to "criticis[e] his grammar" and "refor[m] his ferocious speeches" (158). Although he has explicitly broken the law of the ship, Twain remains unpunished by the captain, who instead dismisses Brown from his duties. As Twain remarks, "During the brief remainder of the trip, I knew how an emancipated slave feels; for I was an emancipated slave myself" (160). Clearly, Twain's identification as an emancipated slave is partly ironic even as it captures Twain's sense of his emergent self-possession. But it is also problematic because Twain's situation is obviously quite different from that of an ex-slave and because he does not acknowledge or address this crucial difference. Instead, much as he does in *Roughing It*, Twain elides the racial and political context informing his rhetoric in order to evade that discussion and focus on the narrowly personal and professional effects his

“emancipation” has for him. While this event marks a sort of emancipation for Twain, an advancement in his career, those achievements are undercut by the personal loss sustained in the sudden and accidental death of Henry.

Twain’s emancipation, it turns out, is also his preservation—for the conflict between him and Brown results in Twain’s transfer from the *Pennsylvania* to the *A. T. Lacey*. Henry, however, remains on the crew of the *Pennsylvania*, and he is among the one hundred fifty persons injured when the ship explodes south of Memphis. Twain and the crew of the *Lacey*, two days behind the *Pennsylvania*, first hear news of the accident in Mississippi. Filtering newspaper accounts of the explosion, Twain provides a vivid treatment of this “sorrowful story.” But Twain’s vividness here does not include his own emotional response or psychological state: his focus is instead on the confusion of the events themselves and on their grotesque consequences. He writes, for instance, that “Shrieks and groans filled the air. A great many persons had been scalded, a great many crippled; the explosion had driven an iron crowbar through one man’s body—I think they said he was a priest. He did not die at once, and his sufferings were very dreadful” (163). Whereas Twain allows us to enter his thinking during the confrontation with Brown, here he closes those channels, opting for a detached observational role that empties these catastrophic events of their potential emotional power for him. Instead, we witness a spectacle of death and suffering that culminates in the death of Twain’s own brother.

Faced even with this personal dimension to the “catastrophe” of the *Pennsylvania*, however, Twain retains his distanced reportorial stance and represses any emotional response. His narration recalls the detached amusement with which he reported losing the blind lead in *Roughing It*; although his tone is far more somber and serious here, the

impersonal attitude toward very personal experiences remains, underscoring the contradiction at the core of both travel accounts. Twain concludes his chapter with a brief description of Henry's final moments: "Dr. Peyton, a principal physician, and rich in all the attributes that go to constitute high and flawless character, did all that educated judgment and trained skill could do for Henry; but, as the newspapers had said in the beginning, his hurts were past help. . . . His hour had struck; we bore him to the death-room, poor boy" (165). Twain's echoing of the newspaper accounts suggests his recognition of the inevitability of Henry's death, perhaps explaining why Twain can only muster a compact "poor boy" in memory of his deceased brother.

My point here is not to criticize Twain for an unfeeling or emotionless portrait of his younger brother's death, but rather to illustrate the dark episode of personal loss that is embedded in Twain's "emancipation" from his role as cub pilot and in his eventual acquisition of his piloting license. Henry's death, it seems, also takes the life out of Twain's representation of his early years on the river. The next chapter, titled "A Section in My Biography" and comprised of fewer than two hundred words, begins tersely: "In due course I got my license. I was a pilot now, full fledged. I dropped into casual employments; no misfortunes resulting, intermittent work gave place to steady and protracted engagements" (166). After the death of his brother, Twain compresses the rest of his early experiences on the river into the briefest of overviews. Indeed, having brought us to the culmination of his training as a pilot, Twain no longer concerns himself with that portion of his experience. The early part of *Life on the Mississippi* is about Twain *becoming* a pilot, not about his *being* a pilot, and thus his experiences as a "full fledged" pilot are dispensed with. As a result, Twain emphasizes his gradual self-

identification as a pilot, his growing understanding not only of the Mississippi River as an ever-changing natural phenomenon but also of piloting as a complicated web of social relations. While this initiation plot reveals Twain's emerging connection to the Mississippi and to steamboating as a way of life, it also leads up to his twenty-one-year absence from the river—an experiential gap that, as Twain explores it in the second part of *Life on the Mississippi*, proves to be unnavigable.

Although he conceives of his 1882 tour of the Mississippi River basin as a “return to my mutttons” (as he puts it in the title of chapter 22), Twain discovers that river life has drastically changed during his absence. The mutttons to which he returns, so to speak, are no longer *his*. Twain writes of his impressions upon arriving in St. Louis, the point of departure for his trip along the Mississippi:

The further we drove in our inspection-tour, the more sensibly I realized how the city had grown since I had seen it last; changes in detail became steadily more apparent and frequent than at first, too: changes uniformly evidencing progress, energy, prosperity.

But the change of changes was on the “levee.” This time, a departure from the rule. Half a dozen sound-asleep steamboats where I used to see a solid mile of wide-awake ones! This was melancholy, this was woful. The absence of the pervading and jocund steamboatman from the billiard-saloon was explained. He was absent because he is no more. His occupation is gone, his power has passed away, he is absorbed into the common herd, he grinds at the mill, a shorn Samson and inconspicuous. . . . Here was desolation, indeed. (172)

Twain's language here is, to some extent, excessive, but it also points to a genuine despair at the rampant change he is witnessing. Although some of this change signifies progress, the once-lively St. Louis riverfront now appears “dead past resurrection” (173). Indeed, Twain's dominant impression of St. Louis is of the death of steamboating, its

being killed by the intrusion of railroads. Twain's idealized figure of the riverboat pilot is one of the first victims of this death-by-progress: the "princely" pilot is now merely a member of the "common herd," inconspicuous and powerless.

If Twain's experiences of the St. Louis riverfront fill him with melancholy, his experiences on the river are equally dissatisfying. Twain repeats the disillusionment he felt as a cub pilot, when his increasing knowledge of the significance of the river's appearances reduced its appeal for him. Ironically, now this disillusionment arises not out of the interpretive science of piloting itself but out of the fact that he no longer needs to exercise piloting's interpretive faculties in order to guide a steamboat safely down the river. "[T]he national government has turned the Mississippi into a sort of two-thousand-mile torch-light procession" (203), Twain complains about the excess of beacon lights that illuminate the waterway at night. Such innovations have "knocked the romance out of piloting" (204). In describing the status of pilots, he slips back into an identification with his previous job: "Verily *we* are being treated like a parcel of mates and engineers. The Government has taken away the romance of *our* calling; the Company has taken away its state and dignity" (205; my emphasis). Twain's return to the river is thus marked by his gnawing sense of the death of his former profession, a realization that the river and its steamboating culture no longer hold their former significance for the now mature Twain.

This portrait of the disconnection between Twain and the river culture reaches its apex in chapter 53 of *Life on the Mississippi*, a chapter that marks Twain's return to his boyhood home of Hannibal, Missouri. This episode emphasizes the author's dislocation, his profound sense of alienation not only from the Mississippi but also from his own

past.²⁸ The chapter title, “My Boyhood’s Home,” implies the separation that Twain feels, for it subtly asserts a sharp division between Twain’s present self and his past—and so belies the apparent, but false, continuity of his title *Life on the Mississippi*. Hannibal is not *his* home, but his boyhood’s home. This division is reiterated in Twain’s account of his arrival: “At seven in the morning we reached Hannibal, Missouri, where my boyhood was spent” (370). At first glance this sentence is unremarkable—simply the announcement of his arrival and a statement of the fact that Twain grew up in this town. But his choice of the passive voice is crucial here, for its effect is very different from the more straightforward “where *I* spent my boyhood.” Displacing himself from his boyhood, Twain suggests the fundamental dilemma that Hannibal presents: it is both home and not home, familiar but decidedly unfamiliar. Moreover, Twain employs a double meaning in “spent,” suggesting that in Hannibal his boyhood was used up, exhausted, and thus forever lost to him.

Like his return to the river, Twain’s return to Hannibal twenty-nine years after leaving it emphasizes the gap between his past and his present experience. Climbing Holiday’s Hill to get “a comprehensive view” of the town, Twain admits that he is “a good deal moved” by the recollections the panoramic view affords him. Rather than provide fond memories of his childhood, though, the view reminds Twain of the current distance existing between himself, his past, and the town. “The things about me and before me made me feel like a boy again,” he writes, “—convinced me that I was a boy

²⁸ In *Lighting Out for the Territory*, Shelley Fisher Fishkin describes Twain’s conflicted response to his hometown: “Vivified through Mark Twain’s imagination, Hannibal would become the scene of archetypal innocent idylls of childhood, the quintessential hometown. But it would also become a flash point of guilt, an emblem of bad faith and corruption, of moral rot, of barbarism—the underside of an arcadia that was innocent only in imagination” (14).

again, and that I had simply been dreaming an unusually long dream; but my reflections spoiled all that” (371), for those reflections force Twain to admit the passage of time and his consequent alienation from the town.

In this dejected mood, Twain turns from his comprehensive view of the town to a prospect view of the Mississippi, a framed picture that, in contrast to the image of Hannibal, affords Twain some solace, some affirmation:

From this vantage ground the extensive view up and down the river, and wide over the wooded expanses of Illinois, is very beautiful,—one of the most beautiful on the Mississippi. . . . [I]t was satisfyingly beautiful to me, and it had this advantage over all the other friends whom I was about to greet again: it had suffered no change; it was as young and comely and gracious as ever it had been; whereas, the faces of the others would be old, and scarred with the campaigns of life, and marked with their griefs and defeats, and would give me no upliftings of spirit. (372)

Once again figuring nature as a friend (as he did earlier in describing the Mississippi’s first secret communications to him as a cub pilot), Twain seeks to uplift his spirit through a picture that denies the presence of the very changes to the river that the second half of *Life on the Mississippi* has lamented. Twain’s long dream continues, for, confronted by his sense of utter dislocation in Hannibal, he attempts to relocate himself in relation to a natural feature from which he is already alienated. While the “lovely picture” of the Mississippi from Holiday’s Hill has “suffered no change,” under that surface appearance resides an irrevocably altered river, one whose romance has been knocked out of it and one whose “cherished secrets” (94) are no longer available to the aging Twain. As Thoreau’s experience on the upper slopes of Katahdin reveal the limits of his connection to nature, so does Twain’s summit vision from Holiday’s Hill underscore his distance from both the social realm of Hannibal and nature as embodied by the Mississippi. But

where Thoreau sees his limited ability to know nature as being nevertheless an affirmation of his connection to it, Twain is left entirely alienated from nature, from Hannibal, and from home. And as *Roughing It* traces Twain's repeated, and repeatedly thwarted, struggle to construct new conceptions of home for himself, so *Life on the Mississippi* reveals his equally thwarted attempt to return to previous senses of home. Discouraged by the altered appearance of the Mississippi, and disheartened by the foreign-ness of Hannibal, at the end of *Life on the Mississippi* Twain remains a homeless wanderer, again.

Transplanting Home in
Helen Hunt Jackson's *Bits of Travel at Home*

Whereas Twain's *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi* embody his thwarted attempts at constructing new homes or retrieving old homes for himself, Helen Hunt Jackson's *Bits of Travel at Home* portrays her success in just such a mission. Unlike Twain's texts in that it records multiple journeys without articulating a connection between these separate trips, *Bits of Travel at Home* nevertheless coheres by conjoining a number of Jackson's "homes" into a single volume. Indeed, Jackson demonstrates through her sketches a fluid sense of "home," one that she comes to locate primarily in her relationship to the natural world but one that becomes detached from any particular place. As Kate Phillips shows in *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life*, Jackson's relationship to place and her sense of home were largely defined by her history of illness:

Because she had been often separated from her parents at times of illness, and was subsequently separated permanently from them by death, she had by the age of twenty endured what she considered the lamentable experience of living in ten different residences. Moreover, she had come to associate relocation not only with poor health but also with loneliness and trying to feel better about loneliness. In

the process she had laid the foundations of a complex psychological wanderlust: for the rest of her life both her physical and mental health would be dependent on changes in location. (19)

While traces of Jackson's medical motivations for travel remain in *Bits of Travel at Home*,²⁹ the overall focus of the collection is not on her relationship to her illness but rather on her ongoing relationships with the places that she visits. Jackson represents her travels not as a lamentable necessity but as an enviable adventure, and in detaching her sense of home from its links to any discrete place, Jackson transforms her regionalist sketches into a nationalist enterprise.

That enterprise, however, does not entail collapsing regional difference into a unified sense of national character. Rather, Jackson illuminates how differences and commonalities coexist among regions, and she uses her increasing sense of being at home in these various places in order to work against transforming the local into a potentially exploitative, touristic spectacle for her readers. Even as Jackson's travels rely on a certain class privilege, and even as her text occasionally expresses scorn toward the lower classes, *Bits of Travel at Home* also attempts to work against such prejudices in order to engage local communities on their own terms. Such an understanding of Jackson's text thus follows in part the conception of regionalism developed by Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse in *Writing out of Place*. A distinguishing feature of regionalism, Fetterley and Pryse write, is its "resistance . . . to imperialist incursions" (239). While Fetterley and Pryse situate regionalist writing as oppositional to nationalism, I try to show how Jackson's text might be understood as constructing a nationalist perspective that depends precisely upon such regionalist identities and that avoids imperialist appropriation.

²⁹ For more on Jackson's illnesses, see Phillips's *Helen Hunt Jackson: A Literary Life*, esp. 19–22.

As its title implies, *Bits of Travel at Home* is a somewhat fragmentary text, piecing together “bits” of sketches about three different geographical regions into a single collection. Jackson traveled to California for two months in 1872,³⁰ recording her railroad journey westward from Chicago through Salt Lake City to San Francisco in installments for the *New York Independent* newspaper. These sketches later became the first section of *Bits of Travel at Home*,³¹ a section that follows a conventional narrative arc in reporting Jackson’s single excursion westward to tour California. In 1873, Jackson moved from the east coast to Colorado Springs for health reasons. Her relocation enabled Jackson to explore her new home territory, and eighteen sketches about Colorado form the final section of *Bits of Travel at Home*.³² A brief middle section of four sketches about New England—the region where Jackson was born and where she vacationed before moving west—separates the California and Colorado sketches. Although Jackson does not explicitly draw links between the discrete sections that comprise *Bits of Travel at Home*, they share a thematic concern in developing Jackson’s vision of nature, particularly the mountain wildernesses of the Sierra Nevada and the Rocky Mountains. Moreover, through each section, Jackson portrays her developing sense of feeling at home in these regions, and the structure of her text ultimately asserts a national link among these three regions of the United States. In this way, Jackson uses her personal experiences to construct a larger communal and national identity in a way that Twain actively resists.

³⁰ Sarah Woolsey, one of Jackson’s close friends, accompanied her on this trip to California.

³¹ The first of the California sketches appeared in the *Independent* in June 1872. According to Kate Phillips, fifteen California sketches would eventually appear in that journal (164); sixteen sketches comprise the California section of *Bits of Travel at Home*.

³² As Phillips notes, many of Jackson’s other Colorado sketches were never collected in a volume (172).

The title of *Bits of Travel at Home* not only suggests its fragmentary nature but also announces one of the central tensions in the text (indeed, the central tension explored in this dissertation): the notion of “travel at home.” The use of “home” in the title is purposefully vague: while it designates Jackson’s national home, the United States, it also carries with it a localized sense of home. The phrase “travel at home” thus has multiple valences, suggesting not just that Jackson is journeying within the U.S. but also that those travels will be concerned with re-creating a sense of home in these different geographical locales. Because the California section of *Bits of Travel at Home* contains the most fully developed narrative of Jackson’s travels, I focus my analysis primarily on that section before briefly suggesting how the remaining sections of the text can be seen as developing a coherent, if fluid, notion of home.

The best way to approach the California section of *Bits of Travel at Home* is actually through a lens provided by one of Jackson’s Colorado sketches, “Boulder Canyon.” Writing of her exploration of this north-central Colorado canyon, Jackson distinguishes between being *in* the mountains and merely being *among* them. “‘In’ the mountains is a phrase we have come to use carelessly when we mean among them,” Jackson writes. She continues:

But it is a significant thing that we say “in” and do not say “among.” Among the Rocky Mountains it is especially significant. Hour by hour one sinks and rises and climbs and descends in labyrinths of wedged hills. Each hour you are hemmed in by a new circle of peaks, among which no visible outlet appears; and each hour you escape, mount to a new level, and are again circled by a different and more glorious horizon. You come to feel that you yourself are, as it were, a member of the mountain race; the sky is the family roof, and you and they are at home together under it. This is to be “*in* the mountains.” (302)

Jackson's distinction between being *in* rather than merely *among* the mountains is akin to Thoreau's claim in "Walking" that he can be in the woods physically without being there psychically: "I am alarmed when it happens," Thoreau writes, "that I have walked a mile into the woods bodily, without getting there in spirit" (597). What Jackson articulates here is a connectedness to nature, and she notably uses a domestic metaphor to describe the experience. To be among the mountains is to view nature as merely an object of your observation or, like Twain, to see it in terms of its value as commodity. In contrast, to be in the mountains is to feel as if the natural world were your home, to realize a subjective link between self and nature that depends on aesthetic and philosophical rather than material concerns. This distinction is a central theme throughout *Bits of Travel at Home*, one that is particularly developed in Jackson's narrative about her California trip.

Although the sketches of the California section follow Jackson's progress from Chicago to San Francisco, noting the sights along the way,³³ the central focus of this part of *Bits of Travel at Home* is her trip to the Yosemite Valley in the Sierra Nevada. She devotes over half of her California sketches to detailing this trip, and the narrative arc of these sketches reveals Jackson's increasing sense of being *in* these mountains rather than merely *among* them—of being at home in the wilderness itself during her travels. Like Curtis's tour of the East Coast in *Lotus-Eating*, Jackson's tour of Yosemite relies on the beginnings of a tourist infrastructure serving the region, as the valley was becoming accessible by the development of new roads and trails as well as new hotels to lodge the influx of travelers.

³³ In particular, Jackson comments on Mormonism in Salt Lake City, claiming that "in spite of the beauty, the very air seemed heavy with hidden sadness" (20) because of the practice of polygamy. She also records her impressions of the "Chinese empire" (62–76) in San Francisco. Twain similarly remarks upon the "western 'peculiar institution'" (129) of Mormonism in several chapters of *Roughing It*, and he also notes the expanding Chinese population in California (391–97).

Unlike Curtis, however, whose *Lotus-Eating* rarely moves beyond the immediate environs of his hotel grounds and the natural features they adjoin, Jackson portrays herself as a female adventurer who defies gender expectations by engaging in physically demanding explorations of the Yosemite Valley. In this way, her travels resemble those of Taylor, Thoreau, and Twain, as she moves away from a luxury of developed domestic spaces and into unsettled wilderness. Such a self-representation, however, also relies on Jackson's class privileges, for her ability to "rough it" in nature is counterbalanced by a lingering desire to distinguish herself from the "rough" masses. In this way, Jackson's California section of *Bits of Travel at Home* offers a complicated portrait of the privilege of wilderness tourism—one in which she subtly critiques masculine adventure narratives by detailing her own adventurous impulses, but one through which she also inescapably reasserts the class status that enables her to follow those desires for adventure.

The opening sketch of *Bits of Travel at Home* emphasizes Jackson's class privilege. Recounting her railroad journey "from Chicago to Ogden" (the sketch's title), Jackson complains that most of the "wear and tear of railroad travel is the result of the contact with people" (4). Jackson's complaint is not simply against the crowded nature of the trains, but against the ways in which such travel breaks down all sorts of social and physical barriers. Even in such a confined space, she can attempt to ignore the "wicked people" and the "unhappy people" who surround her. "But how," she asks, "is the body to steel itself against unwashed people and diseased people with whom it is crowded, elbow to elbow, and knee to knee, for hours?" (4). Despite her insistence on the lack of space, the discomfort Jackson expresses here is not simply physical—for her attitude toward these "unwashed" and "diseased" people appears to be underwritten by Jackson's

class consciousness. It is also undoubtedly informed by Jackson's history of illness. Indeed, Jackson finds respite from these crowded conditions in the privacy and comfort of a reserved Pullman sleeping room. The room offers a "perplexing sense of domesticity" that "triumphantly" separates Jackson and her traveling companion from the rest of the passengers (4).³⁴ Furthermore, the sleeping room connects to a shared bathroom, but "no one but the occupants of the two drawing-rooms could have access to the bath-closet" (3). Jackson thus calls attention to the exclusivity of her accommodations, the Pullman car's prim-and-proper domesticity insulating her from the filth of the economy-class car. Jackson even goes so far as to admit that she was unable to sleep because she was *too* comfortable in her pull-down bed (5). Jackson's isolation from the rest of the train passengers enables her, however, to turn her attention to the passing landscape: closed off from the train, she opens up to the scenery outside her window, describing how prairies and "shapeless village[s]" "are all [she sees] for hours and hours" (6).

In a sketch in the Colorado section of the text, Jackson later reiterates her preference for private transportation over public transportation, again suggesting that a more exclusive form of travel enables a better appreciation of nature. Whereas public carriages mean "misery," private carriages offer

so much of delight, freedom, possession, that it is for ever a marvel to me that all travellers with money, even with a little money, do not journey in that way. Good horses, an open carriage, bright skies overhead; beloved faces—eager, responsive, sympathetic—on either hand; constant and unrestrained interchange of thought, impression, impulse—all this, and the glorious outdoor world added! (287)

³⁴ For more on the interior design of railroad cars, see Grier (esp. 43–50).

Jackson's emphasis on money and self-possession are crucial here, for they signal the extent to which her wealth enables her to isolate herself from anything but "beloved faces." For Jackson, however, private coaches not only enable such a level of comfort, but they also enable a more direct experience of the natural world. Her description of the private coach, punctuated by the exclamation about "the glorious outdoor world," emphasizes its openness. The comfort of the carriage is not just that of familiar faces but also "unrestrained interchange" between the traveler and the surrounding landscape. Whereas public carriages tend to "go slowest when there is nothing to see and fastest when you would gladly linger for hours" (287), the private carriage gives the individual traveler control over his or her itinerary—and thus a larger control over interacting with the natural surroundings.

Though Jackson portrays her railroad trip largely as one of delicious seclusion from others, she cannot wholly escape the disparities between her own situation and those of her fellow travelers. In Omaha, for instance, where westbound luggage is weighed for the continuation of its journey, Jackson witnesses what she calls a "pathetic sight" (6–7). While her previous disgust at the bodies of people on the train is transformed here into sympathy for their plight, Jackson nevertheless remains distanced from the objects of her observations. A German woman is attempting to collect the contents of her chest, which had broken open in transit on the train. Jackson describes the scene:

It seemed as if its whole contents could not be worth five dollars,—so old, so faded, so coarse were the clothes and so battered were the utensils. But it was evidently all she owned; it was the home she had brought with her from the Fatherland, and would be the home she would set up in the prairie. The railroad-men were good to her, and were helping her with ropes and nails. This comforted me somewhat; but it seemed almost a sin to be journeying luxuriously on the same day and train with that poor soul. (7)

The contrast between this German woman's "home" and the luxurious domesticity of Jackson's Pullman compartment is stark. The sympathy the woman arouses in Jackson is limited, however, for Jackson remains motionless as she watches others assist the German. Acutely aware of her class status here, Jackson acknowledges that "it seemed almost a sin" for her to travel in such comfort while the poor woman must cling to five-dollars' worth of belongings. Ultimately, the scene is "pathetic" but it does little to shake Jackson out of her complacency regarding the lower-class travelers surrounding her: her luxury is *almost* a sin, but not quite so. At this point in *Bits of Travel at Home*, then, Jackson remains at a remove from the scenes through which she passes.

While issues of class clearly inform Jackson's portrayal of the German woman and her plight, the scene also emphasizes the portability of home, the theme that will emerge throughout Jackson's *Bits of Travel at Home*. Jackson underscores this fact by describing the contents of the woman's chest not merely as belongings but as her *home*, one that she has already carried with her from Germany to the United States and one that she is now going to set up on the prairie. In this regard, the German woman stands as a parallel for Jackson's own endeavor to locate the notion of home in multiple places.

Jackson's concern with her own comfort begins to shift during her trip from San Francisco to the Yosemite Valley. Although this shift speaks more to Jackson's changing relationship to nature than to any change in her attitudes about her class, it also marks Jackson's emergent sense of home in the West. In "The Descent into Ah-wah-ne,"³⁵

³⁵ Throughout *Bits of Travel at Home*, Jackson insists on using the American Indian names for the places she visits. She criticizes a Dr. Bunnell for not being content with killing the original inhabitants of the valley but also altering its original name to Yosemite. Jackson writes of the difference in names: "No concerted action of 'the public,' no legislation of repentant authorities, will ever give back to the valley its

Jackson describes the precipitous route she and her companions must follow in order to travel from Gentry's Hotel, at the entrance to the Yosemite Valley, to Hutchings Hotel, the main accommodations in the valley. As Jackson explains, Gentry's affords the traveler a much-needed stopover point on the route, and the hotel's importation of a domestic space into unsettled territory offers this restorative pause. Jackson provides an extensive description of the hotel, emphasizing its status as an oasis of comfort in the midst of otherwise difficult travel conditions:

Ah! the comfort of that five hours' rest at Gentry's. If all travelers to Ah-wah-ne rested thus at the entrance of the Valley, we should hear less of the fatigues of the journey. After three hours of the severest jolting in a stage, to undertake three hours more of horseback riding is a serious mistake for any but the strong. . . .

The pleasant little sitting-room, with its bright carpet and lace curtains and melodeon; the bedrooms, clean as clean could be and with two beds in each; the neat dining room and good dinner; the log cabin for a linen closet; the running spring water; the smiling faces and prompt kindliness of the landlord and his wife,—what a marvel it was to find all these in this new clearing in a pine forest of the Sierra Country, seven thousand feet above the sea! (100)

As with her quibbles with railroad transportation, Jackson plays the part of the weary traveler here. She implies her own lack of strength in noting her inability to proceed without the rest supplied by Gentry's (it would have been "a serious mistake" for her to have done so). More significantly, though, Jackson suggests that it is not the rest alone that enables her to go on, but the *kind* of rest provided by this well-appointed way station. Her focus on the interior of the hotel calls attention to its material comfort, its unexpected middle-class orderliness in the midst of this pine clearing. Furnished with a "bright carpet

own melodious name; but I think its true lovers will forever call it Ah-wah-ne" (87). For each of the features of the valley, then, Jackson employs its original name, suggesting her self-identification as a "true lover" of this valley. She notes the similar "hard fortune" of Lake Tahoe in terms of names, as it was briefly named Lake Bompland and Lake Bigler before being "rechristened by the old Indian name" (148).

and lace curtains” and kept “neat” and “clean as clean can be,”³⁶ Gentry’s hotel resembles the comparative luxury of the Pullman sleeping compartment. Indeed, the name “Gentry” itself suggests refinement and cultivation. Like that other refuge from the wearies of travel, the hotel allows Jackson to restore her weakening strength by turning to the comfort of the domestic realm. Ironically, much as Taylor anticipates in *Colorado*, Jackson is able to enjoy being *in* (rather than just *among*) nature precisely by virtue of being able to stay and rest in a hotel.

Jackson’s relation to the domestic comforts of her hotels changes, however, once she enters the Yosemite Valley. Indeed, her attention moves away from these interior spaces and centers instead on the exterior space of the natural world. The beginning of this shift becomes evident in Jackson’s description of the two types of rooms available at Hutchings’ Hotel. One room type enables visitors to watch as other tourists arrive and leave, whereas the other opens out on views of the Merced River and Yosemite Falls. Clearly preferring the latter, Jackson writes of the relatively sparse amenities of these “cottages by the river” and suggests that the traveler must have the appropriate priorities if he is to appreciate the valley.³⁷ The difference between Jackson’s descriptions of Gentry’s and Hutchings’ hotels is telling, for it reveals a shift in her focus from the tourist infrastructure itself to the natural environment made accessible by that infrastructure.

³⁶ Jackson also contrasts Gentry’s hotel with a previous hotel on the stage route to the Yosemite Valley. A night at Hogdin’s hotel, which consists of “two shanties,” is one of “grovelling misery”: “Three, four, five in a room; some on floors, without even a blanket. A few pampered ones, women, with tin pans for wash-bowls and one towel for six hands” (95). In writing of Hogdin’s, Jackson explains that though “the comfortable little hotel kept by Mr. Gentry” is only fifteen miles further down the road, Hogdin has a stake in the stage company and thus the coach drivers are obliged to filter lodging business his way. Jackson’s later commentary in the Colorado section about preferring a private carriage to the public ones stems from precisely such an arrangement as this.

³⁷ This attitude is similar to Jackson’s assertion that “true lovers” of the Yosemite Valley will insist on using its original, American Indian name. According to Jackson, a true lover of the natural world will excuse the rustic amenities of the valley hotel because of the natural splendors present there.

After celebrating the wonderful views available from the river cottage, Jackson describes its interior and advises the would-be traveler:

But if he is disconcerted by the fact that his bedroom floor is of rough pine boards, and his bedroom walls of thin laths, covered with unbleached cotton; that he has neither chair, nor table, nor pitcher; that his washbowl is a shallow tin pan, and that all the water he wants he must dip in a tin pint from a barrel out in the hall; that his bed is a sack stuffed with ferns, his one window has no curtain and his door no key, —let him leave Ah-wah-ne the next day. (104)

In thus dismissing what other travelers might view as the hotel's flaws, Jackson makes it clear that her interest is in the natural landscape around her, not in the social scene or accommodations of the hotel. Of course, her response to nature is enabled by the hotel, but where she previously focused on interior amenities, she now focuses exterior views. Indeed, "The Descent into Ah-wah-ne" and the sketches that follow it are infused with Jackson's rapturous response to the Yosemite landscape. The scenery "overawes" her (102), Jackson writes, as various waterfalls and rock formations emerge into view on her way into the valley. Jackson records similar impressions of her view from the top of Sentinel Dome (Loya, as she calls it), an excursion she makes from Hutchings's hotel with her guide and other traveling companions: "Only by glimpses at first could we bear the grandeur of the sight" (132). While Jackson has retrained her focus on her exterior surroundings, she remains a somewhat detached observer of the landscape, feeling that it is only tenuously linked to the "human world" (133).

Although Jackson initially represents herself as overwhelmed by the beauty and grandeur of the Yosemite Valley, she ultimately figures that awe-inspiring natural scene in domestic terms. Her relationship with the valley, to use her own distinction, becomes one of *being in* it rather than merely *among* it. Two incidents in particular illustrate

Jackson's budding self-identification with her surroundings. In the sketch "Ah-wah-ne Days," for instance, Jackson records her aborted attempt at visiting Pohono (or Bridal Veil Falls). Setting out from Hutchings's hotel with a guide, John Murphy, and a group of travelers, Jackson must stop short of the falls and await the group's return.³⁸ Concerned for his client, Murphy asks her, "Won't ye be skeared? . . . Ye hain't no occasion to be; but I dunno but ye'll be lonesome." (111). Jackson's experience is almost directly the opposite of Murphy's expectations. Instead of being scared or lonesome, as Murphy expects a middle-class woman dropped in the middle of the woods might be, Jackson embraces the solitude and the opportunity it affords. "As the last voice and hoof-fall died away in the distance," she writes, "an indescribable delight took possession of me" (111). Claiming that those hours alone alongside the road to Bridal Veil Falls were "almost my best hours in Ah-wah-ne" (111),³⁹ Jackson writes of exploring the surrounding forest and of meditating on the view of El Capitan, a sheer cliff that rises some three thousand feet above the valley. She ends the sketch by aligning herself with the American Indian inhabitants of the valley, telling Murphy that she likes being alone "as well as if I were a woman of the Ah-wah-ne-chee" (114). Such a statement—especially as the final sentence of the sketch—underscores Jackson's sense of her relation to the land as if it were her home,⁴⁰ a theme Jackson develops further in the final sketch about her California trip.

³⁸ Jackson does not explain her decision, only saying, "Why I did not keep on is a secret between the mule, John Murphy, and me. I will not tell it" (111). In contrast to the suppressed narration of Kirkland's Mrs. Clavers, Jackson's refusal to tell this secret does not operate as an invitation to the reader.

³⁹ Jackson echoes Thoreau's "Solitude" chapter in *Walden* here. "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time," Thoreau writes. "To be in company, even with the best, is soon wearisome and dissipating. I love to be alone. I never found the companion that was so companionable as solitude" (386).

⁴⁰ Such a statement is also complicated, of course, by the way in which Jackson likens herself to American Indians. Like her use of American Indian place names, this identification could be seen as an appropriative maneuver that underscores Jackson's class privilege along with her whiteness. Given the context of her adoption of American Indian language, however, Jackson's aim here is work against the much more

The California section of *Bits of Travel at Home* concludes with the sketch titled “My Day in the Wilderness,” an account of Jackson’s rugged all-day outing with her guide, John Murphy. As Phillips notes, “Like other female tourists to the area, Jackson reveled in the opportunities for unconventional behavior and adventure that exploration of the park’s wild trails and rivers afforded” (168). Jackson’s “My Day in the Wilderness” represents the peak of such “unconventional behavior.” After attempting to climb out of the Yosemite Valley by way of a new trail that turns out to be unfinished, Jackson and Murphy are forced to travel cross-country well past dusk in order to make it to their destination, Gentry’s hotel. The sketch demonstrates the extent to which Jackson has replaced her earlier concern for domestic comfort with an interest in adventure and challenge; her previous defiance of Murphy’s assumptions about her in “Ah-wah-ne Days” is expanded upon in this sketch, as she repeatedly performs beyond his expectations. She triumphantly claims this day as “*my* day in the wilderness,” underscoring her achievement of tackling such a physically and mentally demanding route. It is an achievement that Jackson casts in gendered terms, too, because much of Murphy’s concerns about Jackson are rooted in her identity as a woman. Moreover, Jackson ultimately figures the day’s events as a realization of her connectedness to nature, as she portrays the Sierra Nevada wilderness as a homelike space for her.

Jackson notes that she and Murphy set out on their route in spite of “shaking heads and warning voices” (158), thereby emphasizing the challenging nature of their undertaking. Though these warnings focus on the trail conditions along the Indian

appropriative move of renaming, of erasing *all* American Indian presence from the landscape. Thus, while likening herself to the women of the Ah-wah-ne-chee is not without its racial complications, I do not read it as an insidious appropriation of non-white culture.

Canyon route, Jackson suggests the role her gender plays as well. When Murphy suggests that they might climb out of the valley only to find that a river crossing will force them to descend again, Jackson insists that they should simply forge another route, one that will allow them to avoid retracing their route into the valley. Jackson self-consciously plays upon her status as a woman: “If Mr. Murphy perceived the truly feminine manner in which I defined my position, the delicious contrast between my first sentence and my last, he did not betray any consciousness of it” (159).⁴¹ Labeling her position as “truly feminine” here, Jackson calls attention to the ways in which her twelve-hour excursion exceeds her status as feminine. Throughout her tour of the Yosemite Valley and its surrounding mountains, Jackson must face assumptions about her ability to endure the difficult days necessary for making the tour. Those assumptions are grounded in her status not only as a white woman but also as a member of the leisure class. As Murphy tells Jackson in an earlier exchange, “I only wonder the ladies stand it so well’s they do” (138). Murphy’s use of the term “ladies” is telling, for it underscores the matrix of gender and class that underwrites his assumptions about Jackson’s ability to endure the hard travel demanded of her. The final sketch about California thus becomes Jackson’s platform for demonstrating her ability to, in Murphy’s words, “stand it.”

If Jackson’s day in the wilderness celebrates the success with which she as a woman matches Murphy, the sketch also elaborates on Jackson’s sense of a deep kinship with the wilderness. That kinship is the culmination of Jackson’s experiences in California, punctuating the opening section of *Bits of Travel at Home* with Jackson’s turn

⁴¹ The passage to which Jackson is referring is the following: “‘Mr. Murphy,’ I replied, ‘I shall not give up, and come down into the valley again. There must be some other way of getting across, higher up. Is there not?’” (159).

away from more conventional domestic spaces and toward a “home” in nature—her final realization of being *in* the mountains and not merely *among* them. The rhythmic, methodical action of following Murphy out of the valley on horseback enables Jackson to focus entirely on her natural surroundings: “I lost consciousness of every thing except the pure animal delight of earth, and tree, and sky,” she writes (162). She realizes here Thoreau’s sense of being in the woods both bodily and spiritually. Her delight *of* nature becomes a delight *in* nature, as Jackson associates herself with the animals of the woods. After discovering the tracks of deer and grizzly bears on the Mono Trail, Jackson reflects: “Murphy and I seemed to belong to the wilderness as much as they. I felt ready to meet my kin, and rather lonely that they were all out of the way” (168). In addition to figuring her relationship to these animals as a form of kinship reminiscent of the kind of identification with wild nature that Thoreau expresses, Jackson subtly plays on the loneliness Murphy expected her to feel while waiting alone along the road to Pohono. Tellingly, however, Jackson shifts the supposed cause of that loneliness from the absence of other humans to the absence of the grizzlies and deer. Despite the fact that the diminishing late evening light is making their travel quite difficult, Jackson claims that she “felt also a singular indifference to getting out of that wood” (169). Jackson represents herself as being entirely comfortable with their situation, and she takes evident pleasure in “gayly” arriving at Gentry’s at nine o’clock and astonishing the landlord and guests with her successful climb out of the valley. Furthermore, Jackson underscores her triumph by reporting that, the next morning, when Murphy asks her for a message to deliver to her friends in the valley, she proudly responds: “Tell them I am not one whit tired” (170). Jackson thus concludes the sketch by reasserting her defiance of

expectations. Furthermore, this response contrasts sharply with Jackson's earlier representations of herself as a weary traveler, suggesting the ways in which she idealizes her unmediated experience of nature. While her previous train and carriage rides allow Jackson to turn to nature *to some extent*, her day in the wilderness enables a direct sense of being in the mountains—so that, while her response to Murphy is partly posturing, it also is indicative of the refreshment she gains from such intimate closeness to nature.

In part, Jackson's actions in "My Day in the Wilderness" set her on equal footing with male adventure figures like her guide Murphy (or a travel writer like Bayard Taylor). She adopts that adventurer guise, however, not to offer a narrative of conquering nature but of communing with it, of coming to feel at home in the wilderness in the tradition of Kirkland and Thoreau. Elsewhere in *Bits of Travel at Home*, Jackson further undermines common tropes associated with masculine adventure narratives. Just as Kirkland parodies such romantic narratives in *A New Home—Who'll Follow?*, so too does Jackson question their validity in her text. Writing of her "unconquerable indifference" to the views from mountain summits, Jackson explains her preference for less commanding views:

I think that true delight, true realization of the gracious, tender, unalterable beauty of earth and all created things are to be found in outlooks from lower points—vistas which shut in more than they show, sweet and unexpected revealings in level places and valleys, secrets of near woods, and glories of every-day paths.
(46)

This emphasis on the everyday works to undermine Jackson's own exceptionalism (as she represents herself in "My Day in the Wilderness"), but it also criticizes a view of the landscape as simply a visual commodity to be consumed and observed from a detached

perspective.⁴² She thus sets herself in contrast to Twain's predominant attitude toward nature in *Roughing It* and to Curtis's emphasis on the picturesque in *Lotus-Eating*. Indeed, while Jackson certainly concerns herself with the grandeur of the Yosemite Valley, she is also acutely aware of the area's lesser "glories." Occasionally, then, her focus shifts from the immediately noticeable features of the landscape to minor moments (such as animal tracks), and she places as much (if not greater) value on these seemingly inconsequential observations as she does on her responses to established sites. This turn to smaller events embedded in their local context signals a shift from the detached attitude with which Jackson observed the German woman from the train.

For instance, in the sketch "From Big Oak Flat to Murphy's," Jackson writes of her visit to the Calaveras Big Trees, a stand of centuries-old redwoods that has become a popular destination for "pilgrims." Although the massive trees inspire Jackson with a "wonder [that] becomes akin to veneration" (146),⁴³ the memory that lingers most for her is the sight of a small striped squirrel that has fallen from its nest in the grove and is dying on the ground. The sketch, which has built readerly anticipation for the visit to this tourist site and an appreciation of its impressive trees, culminates instead with Jackson's description of the "tenderness" she feels upon discovering the "piteous" animal (147). The sketch's conclusion thus shifts our attention from the extraordinary to the everyday, suggesting that this small event is an equal wonder to that of the Calaveras Big Trees. As

⁴² While Jackson announces her preference for these outlooks from lower points, she also includes in *Bits of Travel at Home* more conventional summit moments—particularly in the sketch "A Colorado Week" (258–59). Her view from atop Mount Lincoln in central Colorado echoes Bayard Taylor's passage about the same mountain, discussed in chapter 3. She also asserts the grandeur and mystery of nature: "On such heights as this one sees clearly, and feels a million times more clearly than he sees, that this glorious world could never have been fashioned solely for the uses of our present helplessness" (259).

⁴³ The trees also inspire another response from Jackson. The artificiality of the site frustrates her: the trees are labeled with pine shingles and called by "names that stirred most fury in our souls" (146).

a result, the relationship to nature that Jackson celebrates becomes a much more intimate one: not one coldly surveying an outspreading land from a prominent peak or methodically touring a stand of redwoods, but one constructing a makeshift bed of grass to provide comfort in the final moments of a dying squirrel's life. Such a shift is a decided turn away from the "guide-book formula" (41) of traveling through a region and "doing" particular tourist sites. Instead, as in her expression of kinship with the Yosemite wilderness with which she closes the California section, Jackson asserts her feeling of being at home in these places, as she articulates a fundamental connection to nature enabled by a close and prolonged experience of her surroundings. Although she is ultimately a tourist traveling through the region, Jackson insists on identifying herself as part and parcel of the areas that she visits—an insistence on being at home while traveling.

Jackson continues to construct the places she visits as homelike spaces throughout the remainder of her text, and thus continues to dismantle the middle-class, appropriative perspective that characterizes the early parts of the California section. To some extent, the sketches that comprise the New England and Colorado sections of the book are variations on the theme articulated in the California section. In general, the New England section of *Bits of Travel at Home* contrasts sharply with the California section that precedes it (as well as with the Colorado section that follows it), but it also builds on the intimacy so exemplified by Jackson's day in the wilderness and her attentions to the dying squirrel. The high adventure with which Jackson concludes her California excursion is replaced by four pastoral sketches about rural New England. Unlike the California section, these four sketches are not united by a central narrative: Jackson does

not recount a particular journey through a part of New England but rather collects disparate subjects under this single heading. The mood of the sketches is also quite different from the preceding ones: a complacent repose pervades these pieces as opposed to the dramatic adventure of the California ones. Nevertheless, these sketches do share Jackson's persistent interest in the land around her. Particularly in their focus on the interrelation between the natural world and rural villages, these New England sketches extend Jackson's meditation on the concept of home and reveal her deep identification with this region.

From its outset, "Hide-and-Seek Town," the first of Jackson's New England sketches, underscores her status as an insider within this region. Referring to the way in which the town evades the travelers' view during the approach, Jackson confirms her own authoritative knowledge of the region: she knows the real name of the town as well as its location, but Jackson asserts that "it is far from my purpose to tell" that information (175).⁴⁴ She similarly refuses to name the two major roads in Hide-and-Seek Town, fearing that she might feel like a "traitor to the rest" (185) of the community. Whereas Jackson imagines herself the kin of animals in the California section, here she identifies herself with the inhabitants of Hide-and-Seek Town. Not wanting to feel like a traitor, Jackson casts herself as part of the town. She thus subtly sheds her visitor status and claims a stake in the community.

⁴⁴ Jackson spent numerous summers in the town of Bethlehem, New Hampshire, and published a number of essays about the rural town. Once again, Jackson's refusal here to provide additional details seems different from that of Mrs. Clavers in Caroline Kirkland's *A New Home—Who'll Follow?* Phillips documents the mixed response Jackson had to her role in popularizing the town of Bethlehem, New Hampshire, as a tourist destination, particularly through the sketches "A Protest against the Spread of Civilization," "Mountain Life" and "In the White Mountains" (152–56). None of those sketches is included in *Bits of Travel at Home*, but Jackson's wariness about her role in transforming the small, rural town into a tourist destination is evident through her reticent narration.

Instead of providing details about the town itself, however, Jackson offers a relatively comprehensive overview of the town's *natural* surroundings, suggesting that her true insider status relies more on her relation to the town's natural environs than to its human inhabitants. Significantly, the New England sketches, though largely set in villages, often primarily focus on the towns' connections to nature. Jackson's sketch about Hide-and-Seek Town tellingly spends its first three pages describing the road into town, delaying any actual description of the town's buildings in favor of lengthy observations about the forests and pastures surrounding it. The road leading to town features an "unusual variety of tree growths" (176), Jackson reports, later cataloguing the various wildflowers and other plants to be found along the pastures just bordering the town.⁴⁵ The town itself, hiding from view as it does, seems to spring from the earth. Jackson describes her arrival in town by carriage: "Presently we come out upon a strange rocky plateau, small, with abrupt sides falling off in all directions but one, like cliff walls. This is the centre of the town. It is simply a flattened expanse of a mountain spur" (178). Defining the town not by buildings but by its natural features, Jackson represents Hide-and-Seek Town as a border between the wilderness and civilization. Indeed, just as in the past the mountain was a "great rendezvous" (178) between the American Indian inhabitants and early settlers of the Massachusetts Bay colony, as Jackson explains, so too is it a rendezvous between town and mountain, between home and nature.

⁴⁵ Jackson writes, "The road-sides are as thick-set with green growths as the sides of English lanes. To my thinking they are more beautiful; copses of young locusts, birches, thickets of blackberry and raspberry bushes, with splendid waving tops like pennons; spirea, golden rod, purple thistle, sumach with red pompons, and woodbine flinging itself over each and all in positions of inimitable grace and abandon" (177).

While “Hide-and-Seek Town” includes brief asides about local history, the majority of the sketch deals not with the town or its history but with the landscape and natural features that surround the town. Indeed, the sketch culminates with Jackson detailing two of the many drives one can take around the town. Jackson concludes her thick description of the plants growing along the lane with a statement that suggests her connection to the land: “These are but glimpses I have given of any chance half-mile on this lane. There are myriads of beautiful lesser things all along it whose names I do not know, but whose faces are as familiar as if I had been born in the lane and had never gone away” (187). Just as she figures herself kin to the animals of the Sierra Nevada, so too does Jackson figure herself as bearing a familial relation to this New England lane. Personifying the plants and writing suggestively that she feels as if she were born *in* the lane, Jackson positions the setting of Hide-and-Seek Town as a surrogate home.

The other New England sketches in *Bits of Travel at Home* similarly dwell on Jackson’s pervasive connection with nature and her identification with the rural New England town she visits. “The Miracle Play of 1870, in Bethlehem, New Hampshire” recounts the startling colors of autumn that emerge on the forested hillsides of the White Mountains and describes the initial appearance of the Northern Lights. Jackson concludes the sketch by including an exchange between two townspeople about the beauty of the next day. “I did not smile at the phrase of his speech,” she writes. “Our hearts were in unison; and he was better off than I, for his homely simplicity had found words where I had been dumb!” (195). Refusing to mock the sound of the man’s regional dialect, Jackson asserts her connection to the rest of the town: “Our hearts were in unison.” Viewing the *aurora borealis* alongside the townspeople enables Jackson to claim a place

for herself among their numbers. Jackson's third New England sketch is similar to her second one,⁴⁶ not only in its topic but also in the relationship it establishes between Jackson and the town. "A Glimpse of Country Winter in New Hampshire" focuses, as its name suggests, on the pleasant advance of winter in a rural village as opposed to its "black, blustering . . . misery" (196) in the city. Establishing a division between city and country, Jackson proceeds simultaneously to identify herself as being a "strange[r] in the land" (199) and to express her desire to remain a resident in the town. Finally, "A Morning in a Vermont Graveyard" closes the New England section by tracing the local histories signified by the graves before concluding by shifting to the natural grave of an ancient mastodon discovered in the area. Through each of these sketches, Jackson constructs the New England landscape as a welcoming, familiar terrain and reasserts her feeling of being at home, of being a part of the larger community despite her status as a touring visitor. In this way, Jackson's text enacts what Fetterley and Pryse contend is a key distinction between an oppositional regionalist tradition and local color works that are complicit in imperialist designs: that is, positioned as a part of these communities even as she recognizes her continuing status as being partly a "stranger," Jackson is "looking with" rather than "looking at" the people and places she writes about (36). *Bits of Travel at Home* records Jackson's movement away from an objectifying gaze toward an interactive subjectivity.

The final section of *Bits of Travel at Home* is comprised of eighteen sketches about Colorado, and like those in the New England section, these pieces are an eclectic assemblage rather than a sustained narrative. While the Colorado sketches offer vivid

⁴⁶ In recounting the hours after a snowfall and meditating on the altered appearance of the landscape, this short sketch also bears some resemblance to Thoreau's "A Winter Walk."

accounts of Jackson's travels around the territory, they largely treat the same themes of home and nature established in the earlier sections of the collection and relate additional instances in which Jackson attaches herself to local communities. Although Jackson does not explicitly connect this third section to the previous two, she occasionally constructs the Colorado landscape through reference to her native New England landscape. In so doing, she partly collapses the distinctions between the regions and suggests that *each* has become a home for her. Much as her California experiences enable her to view the Sierra Nevada wilderness as a homelike space, and much as her visits to rural New England reveal her familiarity with that region, so too do Jackson's travels around Colorado permit her to construct this territory as yet another home for herself. Indeed, as I noted earlier, Jackson moved to Colorado Springs in 1873—so Colorado had indeed become her actual home.⁴⁷ Taken as a whole, then, *Bits of Travel at Home* asserts the permanence of “home” by removing its ties from a permanent location. In its movement between east and west, and in its geographical reach from New England through Colorado to California, the structure of *Bits of Travel at Home* detaches Jackson's notion of home from any single region. Instead, home becomes a constant negotiation between Jackson and the multiple geographies she encounters. The final section of *Bits of Travel at Home* enacts such a negotiation on the structural level, as Jackson links her connection to nature to a connection between Colorado and New England.

⁴⁷ Phillips points out that Colorado Springs was Jackson's first permanent home: “According to Sarah Woolsey, [Jackson] once confided that the reason she had never established a home for herself before her second marriage was that she feared ‘loneliness would smite me every time I entered the door’” (Phillips 21). Phillips is quoting Woolsey's pseudonymously published essay “H.H.” from the *New York Independent*, September 3, 1885.

Jackson's Colorado sketches abound with descriptions tying her new locale to New England. Invariably, these analogies construct the western landscape in relationship to its eastern counterpart. For instance, writing in "A Colorado Week" of her tour of the South Park in the central part of the territory, Jackson claims, "I could have fancied myself in a wild thicketed cave in Vermont" (262). Similarly, Jackson later describes how the town of Canyon City "nestled among its cotton-wood trees as a New England village nestles among its elms" (378). Moreover, as Jackson explains after discovering in Colorado the same blue larkspur that grows in New England, "finding one's native flowers thousands of miles away from home seems to annihilate distance. To be transplanted seems the most natural thing in the world. Exile is not exile, if it be to a country where the wild rose can grow and a Snowy Range give benediction" (385). Jackson casts her "exile" as a "natural" phenomenon, one to which she reconciles herself by noting the continuities between her changing geographies. Repeatedly insisting on the interconnections between Colorado and New England, Jackson annihilates the distance between the two—building these regional scenes into a national home that, while acknowledging the differences between regions that make each distinct, nevertheless insists on the commonalities that bind them together. Transplanting herself and her home is the most natural thing, for Jackson's aim throughout her text has been to bridge the distances between herself and nature and between the regions that she describes.

Jackson concludes *Bits of Travel at Home* with yet another annihilation of the distance between New England and Colorado. The sketch "A Calendar of Sunrises in Colorado" briefly catalogues five of Jackson's most memorable sunrises in her new home. After detailing the brilliant colors of these sunrises, however, Jackson admits that

“the one I shall longest and most vividly remember” was one during which she could not see the sun. Instead, she opened her eyes to a snowstorm that was “as still and pauseless and beautiful as one in New England” (412). Her final sketch about Colorado thus asserts its inevitable connection to New England, and that link becomes the final assertion of *Bits of Travel at Home*. Indeed, Jackson’s representation of this sunrise can be read as a figure for her text as a whole. Describing the dreamlike scene of this sunrise, Jackson writes:

The air was filled with large snowflakes. As they slowly floated down, each starry crystalline shape stood out with dazzling distinctness on the red background. It was but for a moment. As mysteriously as it had come the ruddy glow disappeared; the sky and the falling flakes melted together again into soft white and gray, and not until another day did we see the sun which for that one brief moment had crimsoned our sky. (412)

Much like this sunrise, the sketches of Jackson’s text articulate the “dazzling distinctness” of each region before melting together again into a whole, the contours of regional difference giving way to a vision of national resemblance as Colorado comes to appear like New England. In sharp contrast to Twain, whose homelessness pervades *Roughing It* and *Life on the Mississippi*, Jackson figures herself as at home regardless of where she wanders: for her, the wilderness of California, the rural villages of New England, or the mountains of Colorado are all equally “home.” Bits of travel though it may be, Jackson’s *Bits of Travel at Home* coheres in the way it reveals Jackson’s sense of home as portable, as being deeply connected to the natural world but nevertheless capable of being transplanted from place to place.

Ultimately, Jackson’s text, like Kirkland’s and Thoreau’s before her, articulates an intimacy with place that resists exploiting the land or appropriating the history of its

regional inhabitants. In contrast to the intensely personal and self-focused nature of Twain's travel texts, Jackson's *Bits of Travel* charts her movement away from such an insular perspective and toward greater identification with nature as home and greater interaction with the people of the communities that she visits. In that process, she illustrates Thoreau's contention: home can be home, be it never so homely.

CODA

ENJOYING GRANDER COMPANY: BEYOND NINETEENTH-CENTURY DOMESTIC AMERICAN TRAVEL LITERATURE

This dissertation limited its focus to a roughly fifty-year span in the mid-nineteenth century, in order to examine the ways in which domestic travel literature of the period helped to refashion and negotiate the concepts of wilderness and home in American literature and culture. While I isolate the period 1835–1883 for my analysis, the questions I have pursued here may also be fruitfully applied to both earlier and later periods of American history. Indeed, one field worth future exploration is the travel literature of the Colonial and Revolutionary periods. My dissertation has revealed the continuities among and ruptures between authors' conceptions of the American wilderness in the mid-nineteenth century, and thus a useful next step would be to explore the possible interconnections between this literature and earlier works. In my introduction, I briefly gesture toward works by J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur and William Byrd II. A large project on this earlier period could consider these works as well as such works as Sarah Kemble Knight's *The Journal of Madam Knight* (1704), Dr. Alexander Hamilton's *The Itinerarium of Dr. Alexander Hamilton* (1744), William Bartram's *Travels* (1791), *The Journals of Meriwether Lewis and William Clark* (1804–1806), and Timothy Dwight's *Travels in New England and New York* (1821–1822), among others. A study of the domestic travel literature of this earlier period not only

could reveal how these authors conceived of the natural world (perhaps contesting or extending Nash's idea of the "tradition of repugnance"), but also could provide a rich comparison for the later works I have discussed here. It would thus expand upon the critical recovery of and discussion of domestic travel literature that this project initiates.

A similar expansion of this discussion might be pursued with respect to the travel literature published from the end of the nineteenth century to the present day—perhaps by paying particular regard to narratives of retreat to nature. In this vein, the works of John Muir could provide a crucial point of departure for considering how later domestic travel literature differs from or relates to that of the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, in *My First Summer in the Sierra*, Muir echoes the sentiments of earlier writers such as Thoreau and Jackson in writing of the connection he feels with his surroundings:

Mr. Delaney arrived this morning. Felt not a trace of loneliness while he was gone. On the contrary, I never enjoyed grander company. The whole wilderness seems to be alive and familiar, full of humanity. The very stones seem talkative, sympathetic, brotherly. No wonder when we consider that we all have the same Father and Mother. (238)

Muir thus idealizes his relationship to nature as a familial one, transforming the wilderness into a humanity with which he may bond. In some ways, Muir not only echoes but also revises Thoreau here, for he recasts one of the moments of alienation in "Ktaadn" as a moment of brotherhood with nature here. Whereas Thoreau encountered "gray, silent rocks" on the slopes of Mount Katahdin (82), Muir figures his surroundings as "talkative." This response to nature epitomized by Muir could be set in relief against

early- and mid-twentieth century senses of the American wilderness, perhaps considering in particular the effects of the World Wars and the Great Depression on American responses to nature.

The tradition of envisioning the wilderness as a home can likewise be explored in much more contemporary works of travel literature. For example, in recent years several works have been written and published about “through-hiking” the Appalachian Trail—that is, of hiking the trail in its entirety from its southern terminus at Springer Mountain in Georgia to its northern terminus atop Mount Katahdin in Maine (or vice-versa), usually making the 2,000-plus-mile trip in less than six months. Perhaps the best known of these accounts is Bill Bryson’s *A Walk in the Woods* (1998), but works such as Adrienne Hall’s *A Journey North* (2001), Robert Alden Rubin’s *On the Beaten Path* (2000), and Edward B. Garvey’s *The New Appalachian Trail* (1997) also provide a literary lens into the unique cultural phenomenon of through-hiking. Situated as it is along the Appalachian spine on the eastern seaboard of the United States, the trail occupies an intriguing border between wilderness and civilization. While sections of the trail pass through comparatively vast tracts of unoccupied land (such as the “Hundred-Mile Wilderness” in northern Maine), other sections pass directly through towns (such as Hanover, New Hampshire) or run very close to established highways (such as Skyline Drive in Shenandoah National Park in Virginia). Moreover, since many of these narratives address the types of communities established along the trail, these works are a potentially rich resource for examining how contemporary authors imagine nature as a source of home, identity, and nation. Indeed, Bryson situates his text, in part, as a rediscovery of national

identity: hiking the Appalachian Trail “would be an interesting and reflective way to reacquaint myself with the scale and beauty of my native land after nearly twenty years of living abroad,” he writes (4). Such a study of Appalachian Trail narratives could expand on the literary-studies methods used in this dissertation to incorporate a folkloristic approach that might include fieldwork and interviews with through-hikers who have not published their experiences but who might nevertheless contribute to our ongoing understanding of the relationship(s) Americans have to the land around them.

If the focus of this dissertation thus suggests expansion into other domestic American travel texts, it also suggests potentially useful interdisciplinary work centering on images of the wilderness and home in American culture. For example, additional work could explore further the relationship between domestic travel literature and landscape painting in the United States during the 1800s. Such work might draw links between the works of such painters as Thomas Cole, Asher Durand, Frederic Church, Thomas Moran, and Albert Bierstadt and contemporaneous works of travel literature. Nash discusses these painters briefly in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (79–83). And art historians have produced numerous studies of both the landscape tradition in general and specific artists in particular.¹ What I am suggesting, then, is a close analysis of these two types of artistic representation in conjunction with one another, particularly since travel writers were sometimes joined on their excursions by landscape painters.

¹ For general studies, see Andrew Wilton’s *American Sublime: Landscape Painting in the United States, 1820–1880*; Angela L. Miller’s *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825–1875*; Albert Boime’s *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and the American Landscape Painting, c. 1830–1865*; and Barbara Novak’s *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825–1875*. For works on particular artists, see Gordon Hendricks’s *Albert Bierstadt: Painter of the American West* and Franklin Kelly’s *Frederic Edwin Church and the National Landscape*.

Moreover, while I dedicate some of my analysis of George William Curtis's work to attending to his portrayal of mid-century hotels, the popularity of wilderness grand hotels in the latter half of the nineteenth century remains a phenomenon worthy of closer study. A few works, such as David Watkin's *Grand Hotel: The Golden Age of Palace Hotels: An Architectural and Social History*, have addressed the role of such hotels in general. A cultural-material approach to those grand hotels situated among wilderness destinations, however, joined with literary analyses of their representations in texts of the period, could further our understanding of the role these hotels played in negotiating the boundaries between home and wilderness, in reinforcing certain class privileges in enabling access to nature, and in constructing forms of national identity based on a shared experience of the land. Similarly, a study of such hotels could naturally lead into a consideration of their relationship to contemporary "parkitecture," the name sometimes applied to the architectural style employed in many U.S. national parks. Such work could fill a gap in our cultural history by engaging with the work already done by Ethan Carr in *Wilderness by Design: Landscape Architecture and the National Park Service*.

This is not intended, of course, to be an exhaustive description of possible work regarding the interconnections between wilderness and home in American literary and cultural history. Rather, it is meant to suggest the variety of studies that might yet be pursued, the paths not yet taken. While this dissertation reveals the crucial role the domestic American travel literature of the mid-nineteenth century played in constructing the connections between wilderness and home, it is also an appeal for more ongoing work

on this subject. Only by building a grander company for this project will we illuminate fully the various artistic forms through which American artists—be they literary, visual, or material—have imagined their relationship to the natural world.

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