

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH, HENRY DAVID THOREAU, AND THE  
CONSTRUCTION OF THE GREEN ATLANTIC WORLD

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of English

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

in the field of

English

Northeastern University  
Boston, Massachusetts  
April, 2010

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

This project presents a historically informed, paired reading of William Wordsworth and Henry David Thoreau as they work within the disciplines available to nineteenth-century writers engaged in the study of the natural world. These various disciplines comprise the many ways nature was figured in popular, artistic, and scientific discourse, and each of these genres of nature writing brought with it particular ways to see, understand, value, and describe the natural world. The guidebook, the cartographical study, aesthetic theories, natural history essays, travel writing, and geological discourse were just some of the ways to write about nature in the nineteenth century that were prevalent on both sides of the Atlantic. This project traces the work of Wordsworth and Thoreau as they participate in these various disciplines, and each chapter addresses a separate discipline that was common to both writers— aesthetic theory, the guidebook, the nature ramble, and the travel narrative—and investigates how these two writers deploy the rhetoric of that discipline to construct a category of the natural. Brought into relief in this reading is an account of what is at stake for both individuals as they return to nature in their writing with unflagging interest throughout their careers. Ultimately, I argue that both writers present nature as the place where they develop and critique ideas about national and local political economy. That national and local political questions are figured through the same discourses of nature points to the existence of what I am calling the Green Atlantic World, a fictional and symbolic Anglophone world that values rural, domestic, and common green spaces. Wordsworth and Thoreau came to this world out of different social contexts, and they engaged it to divergent ends. Nevertheless, both writers trafficked in nearly identical formulations of the Green Atlantic World, and today, in many popular representations of their work, this world remains a powerful presence. Although figurations of the Green Atlantic World predate both writers, by examining the actual nineteenth-century discourses that Wordsworth and Thoreau participated in, this project illuminates how they engaged popular rhetorical practices to create a value-laden, yet precisely figured, natural world in ways that remain recognizable.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe a great deal of thanks to a number of people. Without them, this endeavor might not have been possible, and it certainly would not have been as successful.

First and foremost, I thank Professors Elizabeth Dillon, Mary Loeffelholz, and Stuart Peterfreund for their invaluable insights, unwavering dedication to this project, and extremely quick responses to very long chapters. Throughout my time at Northeastern, Professor Loeffelholz and Professor Peterfreund have gone out of their way to guide and mentor me; I am deeply grateful for their support. Additionally, Professor Dillon deserves special thanks for the leap of faith she took when she committed to this project nearly sight-unseen.

I also thank Professor James Engell for a number of years ago showing me that I had something valuable to say.

My family in Boston—Robi, John, and Matthew—has given me unfailing support, supplied with good humor and a great deal of patience. Their help has not gone unnoticed or unappreciated.

I could make a list the length of this dissertation of all the things my parents have done to help me during my graduate studies, everything from providing summer childcare to preventing me from becoming an airline pilot. But I am most grateful just knowing that we are always in it together.

More than any other person in the world, Carson has kept my priorities straight. I thank him for that, and for making me laugh. Individuals are usually thanked for helping a project like this come to a timely close, but I want to thank Carson for single-handedly making this process take longer. Because of him, these days I work much slower, but my life is profoundly better.

Finally, I thank Mica. “For love,” of course, like she once wrote to me. But also for not letting the world come crashing down around us while I spent a few years upstairs reading some books and writing these pages. (But mostly, it’s the love.)

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## Introduction

Environmental criticism, once affiliated solely with the cultural productions of the nineteenth-century Anglophone world—specifically, American nature writing and British Romantic poetry—is going global. The original focus of environmental critics, or ecocritics,<sup>1</sup> on primary literature set in England and/or America and emphasizing the local and natural has switched, over the past decade, to texts set in more cosmopolitan and culturally variant places. Laurence Buell, perhaps ecocriticism’s best known and most respected practitioner, notes this shift as a change occurring between “first-wave” and “second-wave” ecocriticism. First-wave ecocritics, for Buell, came to environmental criticism in the 1980s with a sense of frustration stemming from the denial within cultural scholarship—especially Marxist and New Historicist discourse—of the existence of any natural world outside of the text. These critics embraced Romantic poetry and American nature writing simultaneously as examples of texts with roots in what they found to be the real world of nature. Turning post-structuralism, Marxism, and New Historicism upside down, these critics argued that texts were created out of an experience of the actual (and natural) world: textual productions did not and could not produce the world, and nature was not a social construction.<sup>2</sup> In Buell’s words, “a number of early ecocritics looked to the movement chiefly as a way of ‘rescuing’ literature from the distantiations of reader from text

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<sup>1</sup> In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Laurence Buell argues for the term “environmental criticism,” though he acknowledges that “ecocriticism” is much more widely used (1-5). I will be using these terms interchangeably throughout this project, as Buell himself does frequently in *Future*.

<sup>2</sup> In 1995 two books defined this nature/culture debate in ecocriticism: William Cronon’s collection of essays *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature* and Michael Soule and Gary Lease’s collection in response *Reinventing Nature? Responses to Postmodern Deconstruction*. To make their respective positions clear, compare William Cronon’s statement in his introduction—“Ideas of nature never exist outside a cultural context, and the ideas we assign to nature cannot help reflecting that context” (35)—with Gary Lease’s statement in his own introduction that his book, in part, offers a “strong defense of nature as a realm that is autonomous and valuable in its own right” (7).

and text from world that had been ushered in by the structuralist revolution in critical theory”

(*Future* 6).

However, second-wave ecocritics have re-evaluated ecocriticism’s commitment to these ideas of literary mimesis, including embracing and absorbing the “sociocentric perspective” of cultural criticism that other avenues of the literary establishment had assumed in previous decades, which has led to a more “global level of analysis” that will make ecocriticism, Buell believes, more “multivocal, contentious, and fraught” (*Future* 8, 90). Greg Garrard similarly notes in his 2004 book, which investigates and summarizes the field of ecocriticism as a whole, that a “key task” for this discipline is to “drag” the idea of the human “away from pastoral and natural writing towards postmodern concerns such as globalization . . .” (15). However, it is in Ursula Heise’s *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet: The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (2008) that this shift in the field is most persuasively presented as ecocriticism’s necessary future. Heise finds that “[e]nvironmentalist and ecocritical discourse . . . remains constrained in its conceptual story by an at least partially essentialist rhetoric of place as well as by its lack of engagement with some of the insights of cultural theories of globalization,” specifically the theories of deterritorialization and cosmopolitanism (51). Ecocriticism is no longer the quaint, provincial theory it was once thought to be; its scope and ambition place it globally in ways that may prove useful as the environment itself becomes a more and more global concern.

Henry David Thoreau and William Wordsworth, the writers under consideration in this dissertation, are strongly identified with first-wave ecocriticism; in fact, the first substantial book-length ecocritical studies feature them prominently, if not exclusively. It is not hyperbole to say that each author is essential to the very founding of ecocriticism as a discipline. For

example, Buell titled the final section of his genre-defining study *The Environmental Imagination* (1995) “Environmental Sainthood” and devoted a chapter of it to the “pilgrimage” to Walden Pond, thus canonizing Thoreau as a patron saint of the American environmental movement. In *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (1991), Jonathan Bate helped to initiate the study of ecocriticism in England, Green Romanticism, by arguing that Wordsworth does not write in the tradition of the individualized Romantic imagination, as defined most famously by Geoffrey Hartman. Instead, for Bate, Wordsworth’s poetry and prose are infused with still-current ecological values: “The ‘Romantic ecology’ [as practiced by Wordsworth and others] reverences the green earth because it recognizes that neither physically nor psychologically can we live without green things; it proclaims that there is ‘one life’ within us and abroad, that the earth is a single vast ecosystem which we destabilize at our peril” (40). Bate is not the only influential ecocritic who can make Wordsworth sound uncannily like Al Gore: James McKusick’s influential collection *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology* (2000) similarly links Wordsworth to the discourse of the modern environmental movement. The poems in Wordsworth and Coleridge’s *Lyrical Ballads*, according to McKusick, “were deeply influential upon all subsequent developments of environmental awareness. . . . Their profound questions concerning the possibility of sustainable development remain significant, and hotly debated, up to the present day and many contemporary participants in that debate would be well advised to consult Wordsworth’s poetry” (69). Buell, Bate, and McKusick show clearly the links in first-wave environmental criticism between preservation, literary studies, and local, natural landscapes.

If Wordsworth and Thoreau are linked in first-wave ecocriticism to the local, natural environment, and ecocriticism now is branching out globally, where do these two writers fit in



current environmental criticism? Interestingly, many critics, environmental and otherwise, continue emphasizing the relationship Wordsworth and Thoreau had to local, natural settings and, sometimes, these critics also advocate for an environmental, preservationist ethic inspired by these writers. This is evident in the fall 2009 issue of *The Wordsworth Circle*, in which Richard Grivil summarizes the great success of the most recent Winter Conference held yearly in Grasmere. This success, however, has nothing to do with the exchange of scholarship at the conference; instead, his article tells of the “minor miracle” that occurred when conference attendees formed walking parties and managed to find in the “‘urn-like’ valley surrounding the Solitary’s cottage the cluster of fallen rocks and standing stones as described variously by the Poet, the Solitary and the Wanderer . . . at the start of *The Excursion*, Book 3” (3). Similarly, at the annual Thoreau conference in his hometown of Concord, Massachusetts, participants can opt out of the scholarly panels to partake of local walks, similar to the “searches for topographical verities” offered in the Lake District (Grivil 3). Part of each conference is spent, map in hand, looking for historical footprints, searching for evidence that the world in the text matches the world underfoot.

The emphasis on the specific, historical locales frequented by Wordsworth and Thoreau has ramifications extending beyond the academy. Each man has his name linked to a corporation that owns swaths of land around his former home and is dedicated to conservation and education: The Wordsworth Trust in The Lake District and the Walden Woods Project in Concord. Each of these organizations, in turn, has its own links to larger state and/or national park systems that also use the names of Wordsworth and Thoreau in their own promotional material. By looking past environmental criticism to the much broader environmental movement, one finds that the words of Wordsworth and Thoreau are enmeshed in debates about what is sanctioned to be

protected and what form that protection should take. These debates can operate on a quite literal level: one newspaper reports that “[s]omething is amiss” with “Wordsworth’s daffs,” the daffodils of the Lake District, “where William Wordsworth loved to wander ‘lonely as a cloud.’” The wild daffodils that were the subject of Wordsworth’s famous poem are being overtaken by a “tougher, taller modern” hybrid variety. The response of the National Trust, the conservation organization that owns property all across England including the house of Wordsworth’s birth, was drastic. They dug up “all the offending tubers—and any wild deviants—and move[d] them 30 kilometers south to Penrith, a major center for daffodil-growing” (“Wordsworth’s Daffs”). Interestingly, it is not just hybrids that were moved—apparently a “wild deviant” daffodil is defined by the National Trust as any flower that Wordsworth could not have seen.

The rhetoric of author-inspired conservation more often is more inspirational in tone. Consider an article written by Thoreau scholar J. Walter Brain posted on the website of The Thoreau Society, a group independent from, but with important links to, The Walden Woods Project. Brain writes to help stop the development of the woods around Deep Cut, the name given by Thoreau to the place where the construction of Fitchburg/Concord railroad line created a massive trench and which Thoreau celebrates towards the conclusion of *Walden*. For Brain, what is more troubling than the loss of the specific examples of biological life seen by Thoreau is the loss of a parcel of land that represents the entire conservation movement:

Is this historic Walden tract being wrecked forever to make room for soccer fields? How can we presume, as a nation, to persuade Brazil to spare the Amazon Basin when we cannot afford to spare a small but significant forest tract of a Walden whose very name spells awe and wonder the wide world over? For it is

not just woodland that we are endeavoring to spare, but asserting the liberating values and leap of mind that that portent, *Walden*, gives rise to.

Brain's passionate linking of the development of one parcel of land (Deep Cut woods) to another (the Brazilian rainforest) in order to implicate the fate of the planet (the "wide world over") is common to conservation literature, particularly when a battle is about to be lost, as this one was. What makes this passage particularly interesting is how Brain forces Thoreau to the center of this debate: "like Thoreau, we wish . . . that the Concord town fathers felt a little reverence toward our hallowed woods" (Brain).

Further complicating things, both the Walden Woods Project and The Wordsworth Trust are used by, and associated with, many literary scholars of Wordsworth and Thoreau, including ecocritics, while serving as de facto regional and national tourist centers. Both organizations house a number of original manuscripts that are invaluable to scholars of each author, and both are associated with the author's annual conference. The Wordsworth Trust owns Dove Cottage in Grasmere; it also sponsors poets-in-residence, organizes school curriculum, and publishes its own literature. More interesting in terms of the greater conservation movement, however, is Wordsworth's relationship to The National Trust.<sup>3</sup> The National Trust, a private British "charity," owns huge amounts of property throughout the country, including a quarter of the Lake District and Wordsworth's birthplace in Cockermouth (National Trust Cottages). Jonathan Bate in *Romantic Ecology* traces a line of direct descent from Wordsworth and John Ruskin to Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley and Octavia Hill; Rawnsley and Hill were two of the three founders

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<sup>3</sup> The National Trust is an organization that does not really have an equivalent in the United States. Like the National Park Service, the National Trust own thousands of acres of property in the name of conservation. However, it is a private, not-for-profit organization. If the National Trust were in America, it would be look a bit like the Sierra Club, if the Sierra Club owned not just many of the national parks, but a number of historic buildings as well.

of the National Trust in 1895 (48-49). Further, the official, self-published history of the National Trust gives pride of place, to a degree, to Wordsworth himself, by arguing that in making his famous statement in *Guide to the Lakes* that the lakes should be “a sort of national property,” Wordsworth “conceived that a large and integral area of unspoilt landscape ought to be legally protected,” something that had not been done “since the Norman Conquest and the creation of Royal Forests” (Murphy 88).

The relationship between The Thoreau Society and the Walden Woods Project is more direct. Like The Wordsworth Trust, The Thoreau Society hosts a conference, sponsors frequent readings, provides school curriculum, publishes its own literature, and is active in local conservation. It is also fused with the Walden Woods Project, which owns the land around Walden Pond and provides a physical location for the material collected by The Thoreau Society and provides curatorial service for this work, as well as all the material of the Ralph Waldo Emerson Society. Wordsworth and Thoreau remain linked to local environments and local environmental issues in ways that mix questions about the responsible use of resources, education, marketing, and scholarly and academic pursuits. It is hard to see in these organizations an emphasis on a criticism of Wordsworth or Thoreau that could be defined, in Buell’s words, as “ecoglobalism” (“Affects” 232).

An embodiment of this nexus of conflicting and overlapping values found in current Wordsworthian and Thoreauvian scholarship can be found in M.C. Nuts, a giant hip-hop squirrel who raps Wordsworth’s “I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud” while wearing a college-emblazoned sweatshirt and dancing though the Lake District as part of an ad campaign for Cumbria Tourism. The ad features him dancing and rapping on the shores of Ullswater lake surrounded by daffodils, manicured gardens, and hilly walking paths. His version of Wordsworth’s poem on

the whole remains true to the original, though it does make a number of alterations. For example, while Wordsworth omits an interpretation of the lake-side scene from his first stanza, MC Nuts, perhaps not trusting his contemporary audience to comprehend the mood being evoked through the addition of the heavy base line and drum machine, adds the line “Check it—the kind of sight that puts your mind at ease.” He also offers an updated interpretation of Wordsworth’s original description of nature’s internalized bounty. Where Wordsworth writes of the “wealth the show to [him] had brought” (18), in his version, MC Nuts, in a rhyme more inventive than anything Wordsworth came up with, raps that “Ten thousand I saw in my retina, / No more than a glance then I recognized they’re beautiful, etcetera”

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VXbrSALG684>). The two-minute video ends with M.C. Nuts gyrating down a path bordered with daffodils. As soon as he is out of sight, an image of a single daffodil rolls across the screen, leaving the words “Respect Wordsworth” behind. This is followed by a second rolling daffodil, erasing the first message and posting “visit golakes.co.uk” as the last thing a viewer sees.

Such artifacts can easily be over-read, and I do not want to take MC Nuts more seriously than he warrants (or, as I imagine, his creators intended). However, there are a number of assumptions made here that are compelling for this discussion. In several senses, this is very much a cultural artifact of Britain: the heavy accent of MC Nuts, the Wordsworth poem itself, Ullswater, the production by the Cumbrian Tourism Board, and even the moment in the video where a butler brings a glass of champagne on a silver tray to the reclining squirrel. However, the college sweater worn by a college mascot and hip-hop music, an art form born in New York City and an underground, urban music of the United States for a least a decade before it became large enough a phenomenon to have an impact on youth culture elsewhere, speak to a much

larger, transAtlantic, and perhaps global audience. Imposed on both of these national frames of reference is hip-hop culture itself. In this video, we see the rapper flaunting his good life as he reclines lakeside with his butler serving him champagne, a scene one might find if MTV filmed an episode of MTV Cribs in the Lake District. One also finds potential evidence of hip-hop culture's homophobia when Wordsworth's line that "a poet could not but be gay" is replaced by "the writer couldn't help but feeling bright." This seamless overlap and blending of influences speaks to the existence of an Anglophone culture that can freely trade on many cultural products even in the most local of settings.

The existence of a transAtlantic hip-hop culture, however, is only the most obvious cultural currency in play in this ad. The other, perhaps more powerful and deeply ingrained because it is the backdrop that heightens the irony of MC Nuts, is nature. The power of this ad comes from its overlaying two powerful modern products of the Atlantic world: hip-hop and nature itself; "respect" and "golakes." MC Nuts is not in a recording studio; he is on the banks of Ullswater. More importantly, the video emphasizes the nature of, what I am calling in this dissertation, the Green Atlantic World, a world I argue that Wordsworth and Thoreau, through their writing, simultaneously help to create and to destabilize. We see a bound body of water, a glen of trees not too closely packed together, and a well-manicured lawn in a park. It is Ullswater, but it is deeply familiar regardless of whether or not we know this; it could, almost, be Walden Pond. The Green Atlantic World is not the American wilderness or the geometric patches of farmland of the Western United States; it is not decaying British ruins or winding hedgerows. But neither is it global—it is the green domestic landscape one visits on a holiday or preserves from development. Its familiar quality makes it local and known regardless of whether one has actually seen it or who has access to it.

Using the more sophisticated cultural, historical criticism of second-wave ecocritics, but returning to two of the authors most revered by previous criticism, this project intervenes in the globalizing push of current ecocriticism—necessary and welcome as it is—in order to investigate Wordsworth and Thoreau simultaneously. For one interested in representing and experiencing the natural, the nineteenth-century Atlantic world offered a variety of practices, practices embraced by both Wordsworth and Thoreau within decades of each other. Each of these practices presents these writers a different way to imagine nature, a different type of natural vision. How they employ these practices in their writings—the continuities in their vision, as well as the striking moments of disjunction—is the subject of this dissertation. A separate cultural practice of the nineteenth century—a common register of knowledge available to writers of place-centered literature—is the subject of each chapter.

Chapter one emphasizes the aesthetic school of picturesque theory, as practiced by William Gilpin; chapter two investigates the cartographical projects of each writer as well as the regulatory features of guidebooks more broadly; chapter three focuses on the peripatetic knowledge of each writer—the knowledge of the walker—and situates both writers as engaged in the normalizing and transgressive functions of describing landscape seen while on foot; chapter four filters concepts of national geography through the travel narratives of land experienced while on foreign soil. Picturesque theory, cartography, peripatetic knowledge, and the travel narrative are all nineteenth-century practices that bring differing commitments to representations of the natural world, and each offers a different way of seeing nature. Through this examination of Wordsworth and Thoreau, I hope to bring useful correctives to the monocultural presence of the Anglophone version of nature that continues to dominate some scholarship of these authors.

Framing Nature:  
The Picturesque Aesthetics of William Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"  
And Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*

William Gilpin, in his *Observations on the River Wye* (1782), writes in a style common to all eighteenth-century guidebooks as he introduces his readers to the Wye river and its valley:

“The Wye takes its rise near the summit of Plinlimmon; and dividing the counties of Radnor, and Brecknoc, Passes through Herefordshire. From these becoming a second boundary between Monmouth, and Gloucestershire, it falls into the Severn a little below Chepstow. To this place . . . it flows in a gentle, uninterrupted stream; and adorns . . . a succession of the most picturesque scenes” (7). Both in its style and content, William Wordsworth appropriates Gilpin’s prose manner in his own guidebook, while showcasing a different English river. Wordsworth encourages his readers visually “to follow the main stream, the Coker, through the fertile and beautiful vale of Lorton, till it is lost in the Derwent, below the noble ruins of Cockermouth Castle” (*Guide* 43). This formulaic overview of a valley is carried across the Atlantic and found in the pages of Henry David Thoreau, who in one of his short pieces of travel writing, states that “the hill on which we were resting made part of an extensive range, running from southwest to northeast, across the country, and separating the waters of the Nashua from those of the Concord. . . . The descent into the valley on the Nashua side, is by far the most sudden . . . a shallow but rapid stream, flowing between high and gravelly banks” (*Excursions* 40). In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the prose in guidebooks as well as in travel narratives called on their writers to mobilize certain stylistic conventions, one of which would seem to be the description of a river taking its rise, traveling through some hills, and emptying into a larger river.



That Gilpin, Wordsworth, and Thoreau were all practitioners of a similar genre is not surprising, as writing about local travel is an important segment of each author's career. Taking part in any popular genre means that one must be concerned with that genre's stylistic imperatives, so it makes sense that each writer would follow the genre much in the same way that the above passages follow the river wherever it leads. William Gilpin serves as an important figure in linking the careers of Wordsworth and Thoreau. Gilpin (1724-1804) predated Wordsworth (1770-1850) by a generation and Thoreau (1817-1862) by two or more, and when it comes to the related genres of travel writing, guidebooks, and aesthetic theory, no one individual influenced both writers more than William Gilpin.<sup>1</sup>

As domestic tourist excursions to the hills and lakes of England and Scotland became more fashionable, popular, and affordable for English citizens in the late eighteenth century, William Gilpin taught a generation of tourists how to see the countryside. The titles of two of his most influential guidebooks give an idea of both his subject and his style: *Observations on the River Wye and Several Parts of South Wales, etc. Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty; Made in the Summer of the Year 1770* (1782); and *Observations Relative Chiefly to Picturesque Beauty Made in the Year 1772, on Several Parts of England, Particularly the Mountains and Lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland* (1786). The picturesque, for Gilpin, who was also an Anglican priest and popular painter, means seeing nature as if it were a picture; Gilpin's descriptions of the natural are thus often framed in terms of an artist looking at a framed piece of artwork. In his descriptions of paintings, Gilpin often finds the reproduction lacking in terms of its adherence to its natural original:

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<sup>1</sup> Though I believe Gilpin is the most significant common influence in this regard, others should not be forgotten, in particular Uvedale Price whose *Essay on the Picturesque* was the text that most influences Wordsworth's "method of analyzing the natural operations producing surface appearances" (Nabholtz 290); Thoreau, too, was well acquainted with the work of Price (Sattelmeyer 254).

But altho [sic] the picturesque traveler is seldom disappointed with pure nature, however rude . . . he is often offended with the productions of art. He is disgusted with the formal separations of property—with houses, and towns, the haunts of men, which have much oftener a bad effect in Landscape, than a good one. He is frequently disgusted also, when art aims more at beauty, than she ought. How flat, and insipid is often the garden-scene! how puerile, and absurd! the banks of the river how smooth, and parallel! the lawn, and its boundaries, how unlike nature! (*Three Essays* 57)

Gilpin further distinguishes between the beautiful and the more interesting picturesque. What is picturesque is rudely hewn, irregular, and rough; the beautiful is often (merely) smooth, regular, and uninteresting. Therefore he extols painters who, in painting a garden, can make more rough what is, in actuality, smooth and geometrical. He asks them in their paintings to “turn the lawn into a piece of broken ground: plant rugged oaks instead of flowering shrubs: break the edges of the walk: give it the rudeness of a road: mark it with wheel-tracks; and scatter around a few stones, and brushwood; in a word, instead of making the whole *smooth*, make it *rough*; and you make it also *picturesque*” (*Three Essays* 8). Jonathan Wordsworth, in his introduction to Gilpin’s *Observations on the River Wye*, argues that Gilpin wanted to “train the eye” of his readers, encouraging them to see nature “imaginatively with the vision of the painter who recomposes the ‘prospect’ in front of him, yet in doing so catches what is essential” (2). Gilpin wants to train the painter as well: “He who culls from Nature the most beautiful parts, a distance here, and there a fore-ground and combines them thematically, and removing everything offensive, admits only such parts which are congruous and beautiful, will in all probability make a much better landscape than he who takes all as he comes” (*Cumberland and Westmoreland*

xxvi). In creating a picture, Gilpin urges artists to take nature and rework it to make it a “better landscape.” Gilpin’s nature is a plastic space to be imaginatively reconfigured if need be, much in the same way, as I argue in this project, the nature of Thoreau and Wordsworth are such plastic spaces. Like both those writers, Gilpin focuses on the imagination’s interaction with nature: “But if we let the *imagination* loose,” Gilpin writes, “even scenes like these, administer great amusement. The imagination can plant hills; can form rivers, add lakes in vallies; can build castles, and abbeys; and if it find no other amusement, can dilate itself in vast ideas of space” (*Three Essays* 56).

Coming out of the tradition of aesthetic theory begun in England with Edmund Burke’s more famous distinctions between the sublime and the beautiful, the picturesque offered writers, painters, and thinkers a more practical way to think about landscape.<sup>2</sup> Rather than the “academic distinctions” of Burke, the picturesque “offered practical hints [and] personal observations” to readers (Smith). Burke presented the categories of the “beautiful” and “sublime” as a strict dichotomy, with the beautiful containing elements of smoothness, color, and delicacy, and the sublime representing the rough, terrifying, and vast. Into this dichotomy, the picturesque offered a third term as a sort of middle ground. However, unlike Burke’s original pair, the idea of the picturesque came directly out of landscape painting (Smith).

This definition of the picturesque should begin to illuminate why its link to Thoreau and Wordsworth is important for this project. Gilpin and, more broadly, the picturesque matter a great deal because in the nineteenth century the picturesque becomes more than a school of

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<sup>2</sup> Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) found its way into continental philosophy and aesthetics, most famously with Emmanuel Kant’s responses to Burke that culminated in his *Critique of Judgement* (1790). In England, the picturesque was posited as the official term for a middle ground in between the beautiful and sublime in landscape aesthetics by Uvedale Price’s *Essay on the Picturesque, As Compared With The Sublime and The Beautiful* (1794).

landscape painting. Instead, it grows to become a way of fashioning the landscape itself and ultimately gives a language to those like Wordsworth and Thoreau who think and write about nature.<sup>3</sup> This chapter is concerned with tracing the influence of the picturesque through a canonical work of each of these writers and examining how picturesque theory was instrumental in teaching them each how to see nature. The essential concept of the picturesque which makes this influence important to my reading of Thoreau and Wordsworth is its assumption of the necessary mutability of nature. As it quickly grows in importance and popularity, picturesque refashioning becomes more than a tool for painters. Land owners rebuild their gardens according to picturesque ideas (in one case, under the direct guidance of Wordsworth), and writers in their poems and prose alter the nature they see to the nature they would prefer to see. The picturesque, as taught to Wordsworth and Thoreau by Gilpin, offers a way to refigure landscape, not a way to capture it mimetically.

Karl Kroeber explains this transformation of the picturesque in his book on the aesthetics of the Romantic period: “At the beginning of the eighteenth century ‘picturesque’ described a natural scene that looked as if it were derived from a picture, nature reminiscent of artifice. Gradually the meaning shifted toward reference to landscape that *ought* to be pictured, a scene that was a potential subject, a source, for creation of an artwork,” whether that artwork be picture, poem, or essay (*Landscape Vision* 5). Though he notes that the fashion for picturesque art was brief and that it did not produce any painting or schools of particular “high quality,” Kroeber also believes the concepts behind it are fundamental to the art of the Romantic period, specifically the merging of art and nature and the resulting fluidity of categories: “The

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<sup>3</sup> The picturesque, as defined by William Gilpin, did not have a long-lasting effect on landscape painting in either England or the United States. For an examination of how Thoreau’s use of picturesque techniques resonates with members of the Hudson River School, see Smithson.

emergence of the concept of the picturesque indicates something new in aesthetic consciousness, a disposition to conceive of both the natural and the artificial less as absolutes than as terms of an interactive relation” (*Landscape Vision* 6, 5). At its most developed stage, the picturesque teaches artists, visual and otherwise, to mold the actual with the desired. To be able to manipulate nature in this manner requires a certain attitude toward the natural world, a distancing, as well as a sense of nature’s utility, attitudes that are not often associated with the ecocritical versions of Wordsworth and Thoreau.

Interestingly, Wordsworth and Thoreau each follow the same sort of intellectual trajectory when it comes to their study of Gilpin and the picturesque. Though Thoreau did not come to Gilpin until he was thirty-five, he did so during the critical period of his main revision to the text of *Walden*, and his infatuation with Gilpin was, like Wordsworth’s as a younger man, immediate if short lived. Both writers experienced a time of great enthusiasm for Gilpin and his ideas, though they each ultimately discarded the picturesque as too contrived to be of further use in their careers.<sup>4</sup> In short, Wordsworth and Thoreau outgrew the picturesque and its aim to refashion landscapes according to the standards of painting. But they did not outgrow the techniques they learned, any more than they unlearned the visual register the picturesque taught them. Further, through the picturesque, they learned ideas of a plastic, mutable nature that could be employed, as rhetoric, for effect. In this chapter, I will trace the development of a picturesque aesthetic in the work of each author and demonstrate in some detail how this aesthetic affects their vision of nature. Subsequently, I establish how the picturesque itself contributes to one canonical work of each author: Thoreau’s *Walden* and Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey.” My

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<sup>4</sup> Ironically, this accusation of unnaturalness is the same objection picturesque writers like Gilpin and Uvedale Price made of earlier landscape designers such as Capability Brown, who was interested in creating more geometric and precious landscapes.

argument is not that these texts can be classified as works of picturesque art; however, I will show that the picturesque, as each writer learned it from William Gilpin, is a presence in each text. More significantly, I hypothesize that where the tools of the picturesque are present, neither author can be chiefly concerned with faithful or mimetic reproductions of the natural. *Walden* and “Tintern Abbey,” texts called upon periodically to display their author’s environmental ethic, at times depict nature as a set landscape, fashioned according to ideas found in an aesthetic theory, not out of any overriding concern for, or belief in, nature’s wholeness or value as self-contained, non-human entity. Like William Gilpin before them, Thoreau and Wordsworth are at times simply interested in portraying the most useful, or even just the prettiest, picture they can, using their substantial rhetorical gifts.

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William Gilpin’s influence on Thoreau is both significant and well known. Robert Richardson, in his intellectual biography of Thoreau, goes so far as to argue that William Gilpin “gave Thoreau language” with which to describe nature (260). Specifically, Richardson believes that Gilpin’s theories and language had the effect of “extend[ing] Thoreau’s range, enlarge[ing] his palette, sharpen[ing] his vision” (263). Even Laurence Buell, whose *Environmental Imagination* has done more than any other text to link Thoreau with American ecocriticism, has Thoreau “ransack[ing] William Gilpin’s writings,” among those of other picturesque theorists, and the effect of this, according to Buell, is dramatic, at least in *Walden*, which “resembles the picturesque essay . . . in its aesthetic self-consciousness” (408, 410). Beth Lueck finds that other American writers with sincere interest in depictions of the natural as well as picturesque theory,

such as Nathaniel Hawthorne and Francis Parkman, were not as directly affected by Gilpin's work and remained almost exclusively influenced by distinctively American aesthetic schools (170). W. Barksdale Maynard, in his history of Walden Pond, describes Thoreau's move to the pond as "his search for the perfect Picturesque situation" (47). Maynard also gives a useful definition of the picturesque more broadly and links this definition to situations unique to Thoreau. The picturesque, Maynard states,

may be simply defined as Romanticism applied to tangible things, with emphasis on roughness, irregularity, variety, primitivism, and the ancient. Natural beauty is a starting point, but the Picturesque favored a spice of boldness and mystery, as Thoreau found in the Walden shoreline. The Picturesque as disseminated in poetry, prose, and art showed strong interest in architecture, especially the rough and rustic cottage, as seen in Thoreau's descriptions of his Walden house and the nearby cellar holes. (43)

As Gordon Boudreau notes, however, Thoreau's relationship with Gilpin is complicated. As he does with other writers, Thoreau holds Gilpin at a distance, arguing with him while learning from him. Gilpin comes up a number of times in Thoreau's journals shortly after Thoreau discovers him and begins reading his work. At first, Thoreau is almost purely complimentary, noting that Gilpin's *Forest Scenery* is a "pleasing book, so moderate, temperate, graceful, roomy, like a gladed wood; not condensed; with a certain religion in its manners and respect for all the good of the past, rare in more recent books" (3: 370), and later in the same entry, he notes that "Gilpin's is a book in which first there is nothing to offend, and secondly something to attract and please" (3: 373). However, Boudreau finds that this praise is short lived. In August of 1852, Thoreau writes in his journal that he has finished reading Gilpin's

*Lakes of Cumberland*, complaining: “I wish [Gilpin] would look at scenery sometimes not with the eye of an artist. It is all side screens and fore screens and near distances and broken grounds with him,” thus condemning the very alliance between art and nature upon which Gilpin relies (4: 283). A year and a half later, the criticism is more serious, and Thoreau dismisses much of Gilpin entirely. “[H]e is superficial,” Thoreau states, “He goes not below the surface to account for the effect of form and color.” And, after spending several pages discussing the fundamental problems with Gilpin’s picturesque theory of roughness and smoothness, Thoreau ends this journal entry with a complete condemnation of the picturesque ideals, which he phrases as a compliment for Gilpin’s prose: “The elegant Gilpin. I like his style and manners better than anything he says” (6: 57, 59). After a number of journal entries discussing or mentioning Gilpin between 1851 and 1854, after 1854 Thoreau only mentions Gilpin once in the thousands of pages of his journal during the remaining eight years of his life. It would seem that Thoreau’s dismissal of Gilpin in 1854 is complete and that Thoreau leaves the “superficial” if “elegant” thinker behind as he moves to what will prove to be his more scientific late-career writing.

However, considering the pride of place *Walden* occupies in American ecocritical thought, and keeping in mind how transformative picturesque descriptions can be, it is useful to examine more fully Thoreau’s understanding of the picturesque as it pertains to the text of *Walden*. The dates are important. The vast majority of Thoreau’s major revisions of *Walden* occurred between 1851 and 1854, exactly when his journals show him progressing through Gilpin’s works and alternating between fascination and irritation with Gilpin’s thoughts. This timeline is intriguing: according to the schedule of revision described by J. Lyndon Shanley in *The Making of Walden*, the years of 1851-54 were the period when Thoreau created versions four through seven of the text, transforming a rather one-dimensional, short polemical essay into the



sophisticated work known today. Those were also the years that Thoreau engaged Gilpin directly in his journal. In other words, as Thoreau was reshaping, rewriting, and dramatically lengthening *Walden*, he was also being introduced to, becoming enamored of, and ultimately rejecting William Gilpin's theories on the picturesque. At the beginning of 1854, when he dismissed Gilpin as merely an "elegant" fashioner of language in his journal and seemingly terminated their intellectual relationship, Thoreau was also completing the manuscript of *Walden*. One question to consider, then, is how much Gilpin's picturesque theories influence *Walden* itself. Of course, this is impossible to say with any certainty, but there are moments in *Walden* which show some obvious debt to Gilpin.

Thoreau explicitly mentions Gilpin twice in the text of *Walden*. Thoreau uses a quotation from Gilpin's *Forest Scenery* about trespassers in English forests in order to make the point that, though just a visitor to the shores of Walden himself (or a trespasser, according to the analogy), he cares more than the landowners do about its flora and fauna (250). Then, in a subsequent and more interesting passage, Thoreau refers to Gilpin's description of the depth of Loch Fyne in Scotland to demonstrate that Gilpin is, in this case, incorrect in his assumptions, even though he often is "so admirable in all that relates to landscapes, and usually so correct" (287).

Gilpin's error, as noted accurately by Thoreau, occurs when Gilpin "standing at the head of Loch Fyne . . . observes, 'If we could have seen it immediately after the diluvian crash, or whatever convulsion of Nature occasioned it, before the waters gushed in, what a horrid chasm it must have appeared'" (287). Thoreau calculates that Loch Fyne is not nearly as deep as Walden Pond, is "four times as shallow," in fact, and would not therefore be the horrible chasm or gap in the earth that Gilpin claims if it were to be emptied of all its water (288). Thoreau knows this,

since he has measured the depths of Walden and knows that it is both four times deeper than Loch Fyne and very gradual in its steepness, more like a dinner plate than a cliff.

Gilpin's error, which Thoreau describes in *Walden* in the chapter which also includes depth readings of the pond as well as an original map, is one of perspective and vision—Gilpin's "imagination . . . dives deeper and soars higher than Nature goes" (288). Gilpin's imagination is in error; it gets away from him; he loses track of the actual body of water. This is all very well reasoned, but it is also a strikingly different conclusion than the one that Thoreau comes to in the journal entry from which the passage is taken. The emphasis in *Walden* is on the idea that Gilpin's imagination causes him to misrepresent a natural feature of the landscape; in the journal, this is not a mistake, but a necessary alteration made to represent nature more accurately.

In the journal, instead of concluding his point by noting that Gilpin suffers from an overactive imagination like he does in *Walden*, Thoreau continues, "Thus it is only by emphasis and exaggeration that real effects are described" (4: 339). Somehow, Gilpin can only get the "real effects" of Loch Fyne through a careful manipulation of the actual features of the landscape, a truth to be lauded, not a mistake to be censored. This is picturesque practice at its most creative—manipulating the present details of nature so it will appear more like nature. Though Thoreau does not offer further opinion on this practice, he does give Gilpin plenty of space to make his own point in his journal:

"In the exhibition of distant mountains on paper, or canvas," says [Gilpin],  
 "unless you make them exceed their *real* or *proportional* size, they have no effect. It is inconceivable how objects lessen by distance. Examine any distance, closed by mountains, in a camera, and you will easily see what a poor, diminutive appearance the mountains make. By the power of perspective they are lessened to

nothing. Should you represent them in your landscape in so diminutive a form, all dignity, and grandeur of idea would be lost.” (3: 339-40)

Here, Thoreau gives his tacit approval of the manipulation of representations of nature to look more impressively natural. *Walden* only uses the first part of the entry. What is left out is what excites Thoreau in his journal: the “real” can have no effect; the imagination gives “dignity” and “grandeur” to representation.

Nearly all of Thoreau’s journal entries from this period which mention Gilpin concern contrasting shades of light and color, or, as the passage above suggests, questions of perspective. The first few entries on Gilpin seem to be used most obviously as opportunities to practice seeing as Gilpin sees and describing as he describes. Thoreau uses his journal in these cases as a sketchbook, training his eye on the sights that Gilpin might have seen and describing them in a like manner. In the entry for April 1, 1852, for example, Thoreau first commends Gilpin’s prose as noted above (calling him an “elegant writer” of a “moderate, temperate, graceful, roomy” book) and then lists or quotes aspects of Gilpin’s theory that appeal to him. Thoreau begins this entry directly with Gilpin’s picturesque: “Gilpin says well that the object of a light mist is a ‘*nearer distance*,’ referring to the passage from *Forest Scenery* that claims “[t]he light mist is only a greater degree of haziness. Its object is a nearer distance as a remote one is totally obscured by it” (325). The second paragraph of this entry is composed of one paraphrase and one quote from Gilpin, noting that the light of sunrise is different than that of sunset and that the fern is the “most picturesque” winter plant (3: 369). The idea of a “nearer distance” caused by mist is important enough that Thoreau looks for it, commenting in his journal later that “[t]he mist today makes those near distances which Gilpin tells of” (3: 444).

In this entry, it seems evident that Thoreau is consciously and repeatedly practicing the rhetoric of picturesque contrasts of light and color: “This morning, the ground was completely covered with snow, and the water on the meadows looked dark and stormy and contrasted well with the white landscape” (3: 396). Gilpin’s *Forest Scenery*, the book Thoreau begins the April 1 entry by quoting, offers the same type of descriptions of light and dark contrast that Thoreau seems to have picked up for his snow passage: “In winter [there is] often a fine effect when the whole tree turned into a beautiful piece of straw-coloured coral, appears against a dark wood, or some other back ground, which gives it relief. In a strong sunshine, too, it is beautiful; when the light straw-coloured tints contrast with the shadows formed by the twisting of the boughs; which are sometimes still farther deepened by some of the darker mosses” (53). When Thoreau notes, “The swollen buds of some trees now give a new tint to their tops seen at a distance” (3: 371), he calls on an aspect of picturesque landscape that Gilpin also addresses in *Forest Scenery*—the ability of trees to color a scene: “the oak begins to mix its cheerful verdure with the dark green tint of the pine” (20). While Thoreau finds “[t]he prevailing color of the woods [in April] . . . is russet, a little more red or grayish, as the case may be, than the earth” (3: 372), Gilpin remarks that smoke from chimneys “in Autumn . . . contrasts more happily with [the trees’] russet foliage or withered ramifications” (35); for Thoreau a peach orchard is “purplish below and red above” (3: 371), but for Gilpin, it is the sunset which is of a “purplish and yellow hue” (246).

Thoreau can be such a close imitator of Gilpin that it becomes difficult to tell them apart out of context. Consider the following three examples, of many possible:

A brook need not be large to afford us pleasure by its sands and meanderings and falls and their various accompaniments. It is not so much size that we want as picturesque beauty and harmony.

.....

.....

One or two small evergreens, especially hemlocks, standing gracefully on the brink of the rill, contrasting by their green with the surrounding deciduous trees when they have lost their leaves, and thus enlivening the scene and betraying their attachment to the water.

.....

The woods of the eastern bank being obscured the firs of the lawn standing much nearer rise strongly in opposition. The eye is pleased with the contrast while the imagination is pleased also with diving into the obscurity and forming its own objects.

The first two are from Thoreau's July 1 journal entry, and the last is from Gilpin's *Forest Scenery* (3: 374; 246). Neither of the two journal passages made it into *Walden*; however, they do give arresting examples of Thoreau attempting highly imitative prose in his journal, as well as some idea of which aspects of the picturesque he values—its hues and contrasts, its broken lines, its play of light against dark.

Examining the "Ponds" chapter from *Walden* alongside the journal makes it clear that Thoreau put to use the practice of the picturesque writing and manipulation of landscape itself. According to his journal, Thoreau made evening trips to Walden Pond on September 1 and 2, 1852. The entry for September 1 is the same entry that ends with Thoreau's explanation of how Gilpin can be excused for misrepresenting the steepness of the banks of Loch Fyne, since he was only writing in an exaggerated manner to express a "true" visual phenomenon. This entry also begins with Gilpin. Thoreau finds an analogy between the picturesque technique of viewing

nature through a tinted glass and attempting to focus on one's inner life. Once again, Thoreau is attracted to the heightened contrast favored by the picturesque: "Some tragedy, at least some dwelling on, or even exaggeration of, the tragic side of life is necessary for contrast or relief to the picture. The genius of the writer may be such a colored glass as Gilpin describes, the use of which is 'to give a greater depth to the shades; by which the effect is shown with more force'" (4: 335). Here again, Thoreau does not seem interested in the accurate portrayal of life; instead, the tragedy of one's life can, and should, be "exaggerated" to give "necessary" contrast to the whole.

After this bit of moralizing, there is a break in this entry, and it takes up again in the evening at Walden Pond. At this point, and for the remainder of this lengthy entry, as well as for that of the next day, Thoreau figures and refigures Walden Pond in picturesque terms. He approaches it visually from distant hills in order to view it as a whole, and then narrows his visual spectrum to emphasize the minutiae of its features, features such as the tiny ripples caused by the occasional fish skimming the surface or, even on a smaller scale, the pollen that lands on the water. Though William Gilpin is not referred to by name in these passages that are literally pasted into the revisions of *Walden* that Thoreau is concurrently laboring at, he is very much part of a systematic picturesque fashioning of the pond as evidenced by the journal entry. A discussion of how Thoreau begins this entry and his description of the pond within it can be seen as further evidence for Thoreau's practice of picturesque framing. Many of these passages find themselves in the final version of *Walden*.

The journal entry for September 2 includes one of the most obviously picturesque descriptions of the pond in *Walden*: "The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur . . . yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and

purity as to merit a particular description” (175). The original journal passage concludes almost identically: “The scenery of this small pond is humble though very beautiful, and does not approach to grandeur” (4: 341). In addition to framing the picture of Walden as “scenery,” the entry differentiates between “beauty” and “grandeur” in a way that comes directly out of nineteenth-century aesthetic theory as defined by Edmund Burke, with beauty being regular and proportional, and grandeur linked to the awe-inspiring and terrifying sublime.

However, what stands out rather dramatically when one begins to look for it is the picturesque ideas of contrast—rough lines with smooth, bright colors with dark—as well as an entire vista having a tint. These images populate the pages of these two entries and subsequently appear in the text of *Walden*. Other than refining the prose and changing the first person narration of the journal to the second person narration of *Walden*, Thoreau copies this entire *Walden* passage from the September 2 journal entry:

As you look over the pond westward you are obliged to employ your hands to defend your eyes against the reflected as well as the true sun, for they are equally bright; and if, between the two, you survey its service critically, it is literally as smooth as glass, except where the skater insects, at equal intervals scattered over its whole extent, by their motions in the sun produce the finest imaginable sparkle on it, or, perchance, a duck plumes itself, or, as I have said, a swallow skims so low as to touch it. It may be that in the distance a fish describes an arc of three or four feet in the air, and there is one bright flash where it emerges, and another where it strikes the water.” (168-87; see journal 4: 339-40)

From the September 1 journal entry comes the image described in *Walden* of “a thistle-down floating on [Walden’s] surface, which the fishes dart at and so dimple it again” as well as

the instructional note that “[y]ou may often detect a smoother and darker water, separated from the rest as if by an invisible cobweb” (187; see journal 4: 336). Sparkles interrupting the smooth face of a lake, lines radiating outward on water, a line separating different tints of water, these are all witnessed on a day tinted by a “slight haze” and all can be read as fashioning a landscape in the picturesque tradition. (186). As is this extraction from his journal found in same section of *Walden*: “From a hill-top you can see a fish leap in most any part; for not a pickerel or shiner picks an insect from this smooth surface but it manifestly disturbs the equilibrium of the whole lake” (187; see journal 4: 337). Thoreau also renders an image of Walden as seen from above, showing a picturesque contrast in gradations of color: “Viewed from a hill-top [Walden] is of a vivid green next to the shore. Some have referred this to the reflection of the verdure; but it is equally green there against the railroad sand-bank, and in the spring . . . it may be simply the result of the prevailing blue mixed with the yellow of the sand” (176; see journal 4: 337).

These journal entries are remarkable in their demonstration of Thoreau’s meditations on seeing. One can witness in these passages Thoreau trying out a new type of rhetoric on a scene that is, for him, very familiar. Through his study of Gilpin, Thoreau is able to see Walden Pond differently, and the vocabulary he brings to these scenes is cognate with that of picturesque painters. Without Gilpin’s theories, Thoreau would not be able to come to see Walden Pond in these particular ways. This is not the only way Thoreau describes Walden Pond in *Walden*, but it is one way, and in using this particular pre-existing framework, he brings a formulaic aesthetic to a chapter of *Walden* often assumed, because of its great detail and map, to be one of the most mimetically accurate of the entire book. The picturesque deals in designed landscapes, and in these passages Walden Pond too is designed according to picturesque custom.



Beside these echoes and translations of Gilpin's work, there is a technical aspect of picturesque artistry that might have influenced Thoreau in *Walden*, and which demonstrates the stakes for Thoreau in employing this aesthetic discipline. The journal entry of April 1, which ends with Thoreau calling Gilpin "elegant," is another lengthy one, and much of it is devoted to Gilpin before he is summarily dismissed. In this entry, Thoreau describes a technique of landscape drawing that fascinated him and that he utilizes to a specific end in *Walden*: the pen and ink watercolor wash. Landscape artists of the time would draw their scenes in pen and later apply a watercolor wash to the work in order to give it a distinctive hue or tint, and the idea of a landscape being washed in one certain color was celebrated by painters and writers of the picturesque alike. The resultant paintings feature sunrises, sunsets, and days of deep mist, and words like "tint" and "hue" become common ways of describing these phenomena when a natural scene is colored in a way that would evoke a certain emotion or pleasure in the viewer.

As noted above, Thoreau practices descriptions of this type elsewhere in *Walden*, and in this particular journal entry he spends time thinking through the implications of this technique. Thoreau begins by quoting Gilpin's own description of the usefulness of the application of a wash: "When you have finished your sketch therefore with Indian ink, as far as you propose, tinge the whole over with some light horizon hue. . . . By washing this tint over your *whole drawing*, you lay a foundation for harmony." Thoreau apparently knows just what Gilpin means as he notes immediately after: "I have often been attracted by this harmonious tint in his and other drawings." Thoreau has seen this tint in nature as well, but, oddly, only "when at sunset I inverted my head." This idea of inverting one's perspective also originates for Thoreau with Gilpin, who in *Forest Scenery* proposes that it is the "novelty alone" that "pleases" when one bends "to the ground" to "see the landscape around us with an inverted eye" (234). Thoreau

explains further what he means: “We love not so well the landscape represented as in broad noon, but in a morning or evening twilight,” which makes sense in so far as that tint or hue is simply twilight and nothing else. But it is more than just an atmospheric phenomenon. This hue or tint occurs “when the imagination is most active, the more hopeful or pensive seasons of the day. Our mood may then possess the whole landscape, or be in harmony with it, as the hue of twilight prevails over the whole scene.” He continues, with excitement building: “Have we awakened to broad noon? The morning hope is soon lost in what becomes the routine of the day, and we do not recover ourselves again until we land on the pensive shores of evening” (53). This passage, which begins with remarks concerning a technique of picturesque painting, ends with a plea to live as would befit the morning or evening sky, a sky which Thoreau has found inspiring only when looked at with inverted head or when a painter has supplemented the scene with a wash, both dramatic alterations of the actual.

The rhetorical process here is worth delineating, since it is one Thoreau uses to his advantage in *Walden*. The tint Thoreau recognizes and responds to is artificial. Whether literally painted on a canvas or the result of looking at twilight upside down, this tint is not exciting for Thoreau because it captures the scene, but because it captures a mood. Thoreau takes a natural scene actually in front of him and refashions it to be one more inspiring, which then allows and encourages him to ask his *Walden*-like questions about the fitness of humanity and how it might be possible to live a life well. It is clear in the journal that these questions have been figured through a picturesque painting technique applied to the scene. The picturesque technique of washing or inverting a gaze is the medium by which a pedestrian midday scene can take on the inspiration of twilight. If one were therefore to remove the discussion of Gilpin’s

wash or inverted gaze, this inspiration would seem to come from actual nature itself and not a picturesque set piece; nature itself would be inspiring since the tint would simply be part of it.

In the chapter “Where I Lived, and What I Lived For,” Thoreau offers some general descriptions of the pond from its shore, and in doing so frames the vista, an indication that he is thinking of the pond in terms of visual art. He is situated “so low in the woods that the opposite shore, half a mile off, like the rest, covered with wood, was my most distant horizon.” From here, he subsequently describes the same scene, again figuring things in terms of the picturesque and, as in his journal’s descriptions of the power of Gilpin’s wash, he figures the afternoon in a way that reminds him of the evening:

This small lake was of most value as a neighbor in the intervals of a gentle rain storm in August, when, both air and water being perfectly still, but the sky overcast, mid-afternoon had all the serenity of evening, and the wood-thrush sang around, and was heard from shore to shore. A lake like this is never smoother than at such a time; and the clear portion of the air above it being shallow and darkened by clouds, the water, full of light and reflections, becomes a lower heaven itself. (86)

This scene, as framed by wooded banks and a thrush’s call, is narrowly limited to what is seen from “shore to shore,” and it is well informed by the picturesque, as it notes contrasts of light and dark, smooth and rough. All of this is employed by Thoreau to figure a mid-afternoon vista as one evoking the “serenity of evening.” This is similar to the “harmonious tint” he praises in his journal as a “hue of twilight” covering the “whole scene,” a hue he learns from Gilpin how to apply to an entire picture as a wash. But here, the idea of an external wash is missing: the mid-

afternoon simply has the qualities of evening and ultimately is a “heaven.” Thoreau has, to some extent, hidden his artifice.

After framing the pond itself as a picture in *Walden*, Thoreau climbs “a hill top near by” and gives readers another tinted picture, coming directly out of the picturesque travel narrative: “there was a pleasing vista southward across the pond, through a wide indentation in the hills which form the shore there, where their opposite sides sloping toward each other suggested a stream. . . . That way I looked between and over the near green hills to some distant and higher ones in the horizon, tinged with blue” (86-87). According to Shanley, these passages from *Walden* were all composed between 1851 and 1854, when Thoreau was most engaged with Gilpin’s thoughts on landscape. However from this point, from these tinted hills, many of the remaining passages in this chapter are from the first version of *Walden*, composed in 1847 and 1848. This original version, predating Thoreau’s introduction to Gilpin, does not include mention of hues, tints, contrasts or rough lines.

This earliest version of the chapter does, however, include some of *Walden*’s most memorable and inspirational passages, such as “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately,” and “I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life” (90, 91). Interestingly, it also includes many variations of the metaphoric morning which Thoreau also emphasizes in the 1854 journal passage. Thoreau complains in his journal that “[t]he morning hope is soon lost in what becomes the routine of the day” (54). In *Walden*, after framing the pond in picturesque terms, and washing it first in a tint to make it harmonious with evening and then noticing a bluish tint all across the horizon, Thoreau writes, the “morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the wakening hour.” He warns that “[l]ittle is to be expected of that day, if it can be called day, to which we are not awakened by our Genius” (89), again

paralleling the movement from nature, through picturesque painting, to evocations of humanity's metaphoric dawn. Though the first version of *Walden* has none of the picturesque washes, it has all of the symbolic dawn references: "Every morning was a cheerful invitation to make my life of equal simplicity and purity with itself"; "[a]ll memorable events transpire in morning time, and in a morning atmosphere"; "[t]he morning, which is the most memorable season of the day, is the awakening hour; then there is least somnolence in us" (Shanley 139, 140). Gilpin's picturesque theories are used by Thoreau not so much to alter as to naturalize the more symbolic aspects of *Walden*. Gilpin's idea of the wash gives Thoreau a way to unify the landscape, and thereby to evoke the power of the dawn. His journal gives a specific blueprint for the process: a natural scene washed to look more inspiring and then linked to the inspiration of dawn.

William Gilpin may not have had a long-lasting impact on Thoreau. Certainly there is nothing picturesque in Thoreau's late journals and natural history essays like "The Succession of Forest Trees." Though Gilpin's influence is brief, it is also critical in terms of some important revisions to *Walden*. Where one does see aspects of the picturesque in this text, it is necessary to remember the qualities of representation valued by this aesthetic theory. It plays freely with color, light, and natural objects themselves; it operates in terms of the emphasis on contrasting colors and shades; it favors borders and frames. It is ultimately a way of manipulating an actual setting to make a picture more dramatic, and in the places where *Walden* copies its strategies, one must consider Thoreau's work as sharing in the same representational values of plasticity and visual creativity that he learned from William Gilpin.

One can follow William Wordsworth's interest in picturesque theory through two related avenues of activity. Like Thoreau, Wordsworth discusses in some detail picturesque theory in his prose—letters, in this case—and employs it in creative endeavors. In contrast to Thoreau however, whose most practical, or professional, relationship to the natural world comes in the form of surveying and natural history, Wordsworth himself practices picturesque landscape design, planning gardens according to Gilpin's principles. In the late eighteenth century, while Wordsworth was studying at Cambridge, the picturesque tour was the dominant and fashionable option for domestic tourism, which itself had become a popular pastime for a nation whose middle class was growing, and for whom continental Europe was difficult to access in wartime. But even without the logistical difficulties of traveling to the continent, the picturesque itself, particularly as outlined by Gilpin, was helping to create an intense appetite for domestic scenic tourism. Gilpin's "zestful books of travel heightened people's interest [in domestic picturesque tours] and sent them in droves to the countryside. . . . Wordsworth grew to manhood when the rage for picturesque travel was at its peak" (Noyes 45).

Wordsworth published his first verse, *Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk*, during the time when English painters were adapting the styles of Italian landscape painters like Claude Lorraine and Salvador Rosa to the English countryside to produce self-consciously imaginative renderings of the English landscapes. Eighteenth-century poets of the English countryside, such as James Thomson, were also influenced by these Italian painters, and when they wrote about nature "their great familiarity with Italian landscape painting . . . often led them to contrive a literary landscape that consciously or unconsciously had been subject to a pictorial transformation" (Noyes 11). As tourists undertook domestic tours, they had been well educated

as to what to look for and how to describe what they saw. Wordsworth himself enjoyed the fashionable tour, both domestic and continental, and on these tours, not only was he aware of the fashion for such exercises, but he also celebrated the picturesque aspects of what he saw. On his first trip to the Wye valley (which would, during a subsequent visit with his sister Dorothy, inspire the poem “Tintern Abbey”), he likely traveled with a copy of Gilpin’s record of his own trip there, *Observation of the River Wye* (Hebron 13). And on Wordsworth’s 1803 tour of Scotland, he and Dorothy were “unashamedly scene-hunting and reacted with great enthusiasm to pictures framed by trees, prospects yielding patterns of sun and shadow, and mountains shaped in picturesque form” (Noyes 171).

It is evident, then, that Wordsworth was born at the right time to experience the picturesque at the height of its popularity; moreover, he was acquainted with some of its most influential English practitioners. Through his benefactor and friend, Sir George Beaumont, Wordsworth twice visited Uvedale Price. Price himself predated Gilpin by a few years and helped establish the picturesque fashion in England with his publication of *Essay on the Picturesque, As Compared With The Sublime and The Beautiful* (1794). Though Price’s definition of the picturesque differed somewhat from Gilpin’s in that Price attempted to define it as a balance between the categories of the Sublime and the Beautiful, it shared the dominant features. Price encouraged property owners interested in picturesque improvements to manage their estates based on the “universal *principles* of painting”; likewise, for Price, “the most effective means of evoking the picturesque are roughness and sudden variation, joined to regularity” (Noyes 33, 32). Price’s picturesque, as a middle ground between beauty and sublimity, shares the same values as Gilpin’s.

Neither a painter himself nor aesthetically trained, Wordsworth relied primarily on Beaumont to help him fashion his taste in the techniques of picturesque painting. As an amateur painter, Beaumont even made plans to depict Wordsworth's poem "The Thorn" on his own canvas (*Letters 1787-1805* 588). In a letter to Coleridge, in which she notes that Wordsworth found the scenery on a trip to Rydale to be "whatever Salvator might desire," Dorothy Wordsworth also writes that the views were such that Wordsworth "longed for Sir George Beaumont" with whom he could share them (*Letters 1787-1805* 449). However, the way in which Beaumont best served Wordsworth's development of an appreciation of the picturesque came not from what he taught, but from the land he owned. With the blessing of Beaumont, Wordsworth undertook a massive redesign of one of his gardens. The links between Wordsworth's knowledge of the picturesque as a theory and this garden design are explicit: Wordsworth was the sole "architect" of this "winter garden at Coleorton and the letters written in connection with the project in the years 1805-7 stand as one of the main texts of high Picturesque garden design" (Murdoch 80). These letters also exhibit the unexamined tension inherent in picturesque theory, a tension that lingers on, unexamined and unresolved still for critics who argue for a "Green" Wordsworth. On the one hand Wordsworth claims that the beauty to be found in a rural home is from its accordance to nature—"your House will belong to the Country and the Country be an appendage to your House" (*Letters 1787-1805* 623). On the other hand, Wordsworth must dramatically alter the landscape to achieve this natural ideal.<sup>5</sup>

In a letter to Beaumont before Wordsworth was asked by him to redesign this garden, Wordsworth sympathizes with the necessary difficulties the Beaumonts were experiencing as

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<sup>5</sup> See Ian Thompspon's article, "William Wordsworth, Landscape Architect," for a recent examination of Wordsworth's relationship to landscape design. Thompspon shows this very tension, attributing an ecological ethic to Wordsworth while demonstrating how well planned his manipulations are.



they made substantial improvements to their home, assuring him that at least “the grounds . . . have . . . the advantage of being in good hands, namely those of Nature.” In this 1805 letter, Wordsworth also creates a strong link between poetry, painting, and landscape design, calling each a “liberal art,” which “ought . . . to move the affections under the controul [sic] of good sense.” Poetry, painting, and landscape design are meant to “assist Nature in moving the affections” of “human kind as impersonated in unwarped and enlightened minds.” In fact, Wordsworth argues, landscape designers are more important than poets or painters who are “merely putting together words or colours,” since these designers deal with “the realities of things”:

of the joy and happiness of living creatures; of men and children, of birds and beasts, of hills and streams, and trees and flowers; with the changes of night and day, evening and morning, summer and winter; and all their unwearied actions and energies, as benign in the spirit that animates them as they are beautiful and grand in that form and clothing which is given to them for the delight of our senses.

Wordsworth here bestows divine responsibility on the landscape designer—a Genesis-like description the natural world and man’s dominion over it. If the landscape designer is playing God, the scope of his aesthetic reach must be grand. Therefore, it does not surprise a reader when Wordsworth, still in this same letter, expresses satisfaction that the village situated on the estate will not be razed. This satisfaction arises not out of concern for the citizens, but out of a concern for the scene’s aesthetic affect on the artistic mind. “Strip my Neighbourhood of human beings,” Wordsworth explains, and you have “all the poverty of solitude, nothing of its elevation” (*Letters 1787-1805* 623, 627). Wordsworth implies that the rural poor and working

class give some poetic relief to the country house landscape which the sensitive individual would necessarily miss if all the people were removed.

The work itself that Wordsworth personally undertook for Beaumont is extensive, and it gives concrete evidence of Wordsworth bringing to fruition his epistolary ideals. This job was, of course, too large for just one individual. This said, for a time during the garden's construction Wordsworth was visiting the site twice daily and personally supervising all the work, which included the planting of hundreds of trees and shrubs (including American azaleas), the construction of an isolated "glade" complete with a pool and the attendant goldfish (two), the enclosure of the entire garden with evergreen shrubs, an inner sanctuary, "compartments, bowers, and alleys," and a stone fountain (Noyes 111-21, 115). Wordsworth in fact wrote out a minutely detailed plan for all these alterations in a December 1806 letter to Lady Beaumont, a letter he claims at its close is the "longest Letter I ever wrote in my life" (*Letters 1806-1811* 120).

This letter notes that the deteriorating cottage should remain, though it is "certainly not *necessary* . . . but its irregular and picturesque form, its tall chimneys in particular, plead strongly with me for its being retained" (*Letters 1806-1811* 113). An "old ugly Wall (made still uglier with nettles and rubbish)" will be hidden with a hedge to serve as a "formal Boundary . . . to revive the artificial character of the place in a pleasing way" (114). Deliberating more on this wall, with an apology for "being tedious," Wordsworth is clear to note that it, "as the most artificial, ought to be the most splendid and ornamental part of the Garden" (114-15). From the wall, Wordsworth envisions steps down into a garden whose beauty would be heightened "by a conception which I have of bringing the water, which I am told may be done without much expense, and letting it trickle down the bank about the roots of the Witch Elm, so as if not to

make a waterfall . . . at least a dripping of water” (114). If more water can be had in an affordable manner, Wordsworth writes, sheepishly but with some passion, that he is

old-fashioned enough to like in certain places even Jet d’eaux; I do not mean merely in towns and among buildings . . . but also among rural scenes where water is scarce. They certainly make a great show out of a little substance and the diamond drops of light which they scatter round them and the Halos and Rainbows which the misty vapour shows in sunshine and the dewy freshness which it seems to spread through the air, are all great recommendations of them to me. (116)

The very goldfish are to be highlighted in a way that emphasizes a picturesque contrast of color. If the two gold or silver fish are not hardy enough to survive year round, Wordsworth allows that “any others of the most radiant colours that are more hardy” will do. These bright colors are essential as the fish are to be “the ‘Genii’ of the Pool and of the place” in contrast with the “monotonous color of the trees” (116). To disabuse his correspondent of any notion that, by stating he desires to have the Beaumont’s estate “belong to the Country,” Wordsworth actually means that he desires to preserve nature as it was found, one may consider two other brief notes from this letter. First, Wordsworth recommends to the Beaumonts holly and laurel trees for their garden because the poet Robert Burns praises them in verse, and the brambled rose because he is partial to the description of poet James Graham in his “Birds of Scotland” collection. Of course, neither Scottish poet is writing about the Lake District. Not only are these plants and flowers not local but they also come from literary, not ecological, sources. Second, Wordsworth did not comb the local hills by himself to find his additions to this landscaping project; instead he urges

Lady Beaumont to “take the trouble of visiting some large nursery Gardens in the neighborhood of London” to procure the necessary, and apparently hard to find, plants (119).

Wordsworth did not undertake this project without ample previous experience. By 1805, he had already completed a similar project, if on a much smaller scale, at his own home at Grasmere, Dove Cottage. That garden, situated up a steep embankment behind the small house “was itself a major artifact of Picturesque garden design” (Murdoch 80): “Of all of Wordsworth’s gardening activity none better exemplifies his ideal of Art working with the Spirit of Nature in the service of Man than the orchard-garden he and Dorothy created at Dove Cottage. They had found a sheltered spot that they reconstructed in harmony with the hills and planted with the wild nature that grew in Nature’s midst” (Noyes 109-10). However, Wordsworth was somewhat limited by the conditions at both Coleorton and Dove Cottage; at the former, Wordsworth was constrained by the fact that he was designing for someone besides himself, and at Dove Cottage he did not have much land to work with. It was not until Wordsworth moved to his much larger home at Rydal Mount that he had the space, freedom, and income to design the landscape according solely to his wishes, and he took full advantage of the opportunity. On land that already featured a raised hill, Wordsworth again

raised the mound, giving it two ascents; he reduced the kitchen garden, transforming part of it to lawn; he constructed three terraces, each having its special use and attractiveness; he built a summer house, strategically located; he cleared and walled a well, and built a pool for goldfish and silverfish; he laid out pathways and stone steps; he planned gates and graveled walks; he wrote inscriptions which were engraved in the rocks; and he set out innumerable native shrubs, trees, and flowers on the slope. (Noyes 127)

This was not the first “improvement” ever seen at Rydal Mount. Just the opposite in fact—“Wordsworth simply extended, elaborated, and adorned what he came upon, making this in sympathy with its history as one of the important new gardens of the early nineteenth century” (Murdoch 86). Even if one were to quibble with Russell Noyes, who in his study of Wordsworth and landscape, makes the claim that “Wordsworth considered landscape gardening as an art worthy to be bracketed with both painting and poetry,” it is nonetheless evident that, at the very least, Wordsworth gave the physical fashioning of nature serious, sustained attention (91). Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the same principles that underlie his landscape theories underlie at least some of his poetry, a significant correlation considering how dramatically he manipulates physical nature to achieve his desired effect.

As a transition from Wordsworth’s picturesque landscape design to his picturesque poetry, it is useful to keep in mind his conception of the imagination. It is not surprising to find Wordsworth responding positively to the picturesque’s ability to refashion a landscape since, after all, he famously claims that the ideal attitude to nature is one of equal parts appreciation and creation, a relationship where the mind “half creates” the nature seen by the eye. Particularly in Wordsworth’s early work, the picturesque offers an aesthetic system for articulating his feelings about the imagination, a “way of perceiving imaginatively the landscape that would be the center of his attempts to realize imagination” (Trott 114). Wordsworth is always mindful of the imagination’s work on a landscape. It is an idea that was the subject of much of his best work such as “Tintern Abby” and *The Prelude*, and it stems from, at least in part, his self-education in picturesque theory and travel writing. “Wordsworth insists,” according to Noyes, “that the true artist, whether painter or poet, must always be free to record his own imaginative reactions and

conceptions” (63). His ideas about the imagination are particularly hospitable to the transformative ideals of picturesque theory.

The picturesque is an obvious presence in such early poetry as *Descriptive Sketches* and *An Evening Walk*. In fact, these early poems demonstrate his knowledge of picturesque theory well before his relationship with Beaumont and the letters of 1805-06. He stated his “willingness to submit essays” for *The Philanthropist* on the picturesque as early as 1795, and entries in Dorothy’s journal predating their relationship with the Beaumonts “contain frequent criticisms of the landscape gardening and rural building which they observed in the Lake Country or on their travels in Germany and Scotland” (Nabholtz 265).<sup>6</sup> By 1791, when he was composing *Descriptive Sketches*, Wordsworth “seem[ed] to be well versed in the standards of taste in landscape painting and in the picturesque and the sublime” (Noyes 55), and *An Evening Walk* “depicts the scenery of the Lake District itself, and in effect makes a picturesque tour of the region” (Trott 115). *An Evening Walk* offers almost a feature-by-feature representation of aspects of picturesque art included in paintings, presenting “variations of landscape as revealed in the gradations of evening light: sunset, twilight, and moonlight” (Noyes 150). In this poem, Wordsworth describes isolated rustic homes with a single curl of chimney smoke; impoverished mothers and children marking a dusky landscape with dignity; sunlight filtered through trees, through clouds, through rock strewn hillsides; and moonlight subsequently gleaming through the same. (There is also a perhaps too lengthy description of a very picturesque swan.)

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<sup>6</sup> As it is the subject of chapter two, I will not be discussing Wordsworth’s *Guide to the Lakes* here. However, its frequent use of picturesque vocabulary and sentiment should be noted. Though the picturesque is not directly addressed in that work, its values form a basis of Wordsworth’s appreciation of the lakes and their surrounding countryside. The manner in which the picturesque can easily be employed to describe the Lake District may, in part, be why Wordsworth found the picturesque so useful: “Wordsworth’s preference for the Lake Country on picturesque grounds is . . . insistent because in this case the rules of pictorial art went directly to the heart of the visual effect of his native scenery” (Nabholtz 296).

In her extended discussion of the picturesque use of light in *An Evening Walk*, Nicola Trott emphasizes Wordsworth's use of "chiaroscuro," a term for the style of Italian landscape painting that contrasted light and dark and became consistently used by English picturesque painters.<sup>7</sup> Trott's argument is useful for reasons besides her insights into *An Evening Walk*, as she also traces picturesque theory through Wordsworth's later work. Trott notes that in *An Evening Walk* Wordsworth places himself at the same vantage point described by William Gilpin, just above Rydal Falls, and then describes the "magical effect of light picturesquely distributed" over the lake and subsequently "redefines such magic in the chiaroscuro of a lake that is itself 'painted' by breezes" (117). In this way, Wordsworth goes beyond even Gilpin by employing a separate picturesque technique of painting—chiaroscuro—on a scene already made famous by a previous picturesque portrayal—that of William Gilpin. This may be why the natural descriptions in *An Evening Walk* seem so fanciful: they are Wordsworth's reimagining, or reglossing, of a picture that had already been completed. Trott also sees elements of chiaroscuro throughout much of Wordsworth's subsequent work, in particular in some of his most famous passages. The technique of chiaroscuro that he "inherits from picturesque" theory is seen "in the profound light-and-dark of the *Prelude* landscape: the Simplon Pass, the Cave of Yordas, and Mount Snowden" (116). What makes Trott's analysis of chiaroscuro particularly telling is that she finds elements of the picturesque in passages written after Wordsworth claimed to dismiss the technique.

Wordsworth also employs picturesque techniques in "Tintern Abbey," a poem, like *The Prelude*, which is considered to be one of Wordsworth's original responses to the natural world. Tintern Abbey itself, an abandoned monastery dating back to the sixteenth century, was just one

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<sup>7</sup> Chiaroscuro originated in Italian Baroque art and refers to the positioning of the light source to the side of the canvas, so as to create a contrast of light (chiaro) and dark (oscuro), and dramatic highlights and shadow.

of the highlights of the Wye Valley, a destination for seekers of the picturesque. Not only was the valley itself “one of the most popular landscapes in Britain” for those with the income to travel domestically, but written depictions of it, in the form of the travel narratives, were widely circulated. In fact, at the time of its composition, Wordsworth’s famous poem is “one among many” responses to the Wye valley (Hebron 1). As tourist destination, the Wye offered more than vistas of the river and the ruins of the abbey. When Wordsworth made his first visit, there were eight pleasure boats employed at various places down the river, and just downstream the 300 acre Piercefield estate, fashioned by the famous landscape designer Capability Brown, was open several days a week to tourists who could marvel at the ten picturesque stations overlooking the vales, or who could pay to have swivel guns fired for the benefit of their echoes (Hebron 3, 5). Gilpin above anyone else was responsible for making the Wye valley famous for its picturesque qualities: he published his first guide based on his trips there and used the valley as the basis for the first, and most detailed, explanation of his picturesque theory. Wordsworth’s repeated trips to the Wye, including the trip during which he composed the text of “Tintern Abbey” as he walked home with Dorothy, are themselves part of this aesthetic tradition. Wordsworth is like many other visitors to the Wye, “fashionable connoisseurs, ready to select, adopt and embellish the landscape in the preconceived ways suggested to them in contemporary literature, and art, most of all by Gilpin” (Hebron 13).

In *Romantics and British Landscape*, Stephen Hebron, after explaining how essential the picturesque was to both Wordsworth and depictions of the Wye, concludes that because there are no references to Tintern Abbey itself in the eponymous poem, nor to “any recognizable part of the Wye valley,” and because of Wordsworth’s “hints at profound personal resonances,” it is “these thoughts and feelings, not the outward forms of the scenery, that are the subject of the



poem (13). For Hebron, “Tintern Abbey” “was a completely original response to the landscape of the Wye valley,” despite the genre from which Wordsworth emerges as poet, theorist, and traveler. Hebron believes that Wordsworth’s poem is so unique that by the 1830s “Wordsworth had replaced Gilpin as the representative voice of the Wye,” thus, though Hebron does not make this point explicitly, ending the entire region’s relationship to picturesque depiction (19).

Likewise, Anne Janowitz argues that “Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey,” because it does not describe the abbey itself, marks a definitive departure from the picturesque, echoing the ideas of Hebron. In *England’s Ruins*, Janowitz finds in “Tintern Abbey” the “terminus of the picturesque ruin poem: the building entirely eradicated from landscape, and the monument figured as the workings of a redemptive poetic memory. . . . The ruins of nature are reclaimed through the poetic process of humanization, and the cultural ruins of cottage and abbey are settled into a benign soil” (126). However, what Wordsworth accomplishes in “Tintern Abbey” is neither wholly original nor wholly removed from the picturesque. What separates “Tintern Abbey” from more traditional picturesque depictions is the poetic, individuating end, not the picturesque means to get there, since the picturesque remains an essential idiom in the poem.

Hebron and Janowitz are correct to argue that something different is happening in “Tintern Abbey,” but because the poem comes directly out of the picturesque tradition, it remains indebted to many of that tradition’s stylistic rhetorical maneuvers. That Wordsworth does not intend the poem to be his addition to the well-worn genre of travel writing that highlights picturesque features of the Wye valley, that he intends something very different—a personal response to the natural that marks much of his greatest poetry—is, in this regard, beside

the point. For the fact remains that picturesque techniques of landscape depiction operate in this poem, and because they do, Wordsworth's writing refashions the landscape according to these set principles of the picturesque. This reading of "Tintern Abbey" does not diminish the importance of Wordsworth's individualized response to nature in the poem. Wordsworth's vision of nature is indeed unique; it is his tools that are familiar.

Even forgoing a discussion of the picturesque, "Tintern Abbey" can be read as a continuation of other traditions of Wye Valley tourist writing. According to Hebron, "As they viewed the Wye scenery . . . Gilpin and followers usually found that it was in need of improvement" (7). Gilpin himself complains of the noise from the "heavy industry" near the Abbey as well as of the "shabby houses" (9). Gilpin objects to the large number of small buildings and dwellings around the Abbey, which only highlighted "the extreme poverty of the local inhabitants, who lived in wretched conditions around the ruins and who sought to make a living off the tourists." As for the industry, it too was a problem since by the 1790s "the ironworks at Tintern had grown to such a size that they operated ceaselessly, both day and night, and employed upwards of 1,500 people" (Hebron 7, 9). "Tintern Abbey" the poem shows only hints of this. Of industry, there is none. The workers and the peasants, not to mention the other tourists, are all sublimated to the lovely image of "wreaths of smoke / Sent up, in silence, from among the trees, / With some uncertain notice, as might seem, / Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods, / Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire / The hermit sits, alone" (18-23). Poverty and industry here have been effaced by isolated individuals sparsely populating a green hillside.

"Tintern Abbey" is set in a precise location—not at the Abbey itself, but a few miles upstream, as the full title indicates. Wordsworth takes exactly one stanza—the first—to run

through a number of picturesque features of the scene, as if checking off items on a picturesque to-do list. The poet hears “these waters, rolling from their mountain-springs” along cliffs that are “steep and lofty” (3, 5); he traces “plots of cottage-ground, these orchard tufts” which are “clad in one green hue” (11, 13); and he notes that the hedge-rows are “hardly hedge-rows,” just “little lines / of sportive wood run wild” (15-16). Though critics such as Janowitz emphasize that the Abbey is itself missing from “Tintern Abbey,” it can not be discounted. The entire poem is in the figurative shadows of what is perhaps the most famous church ruin in England. These features of “Tintern Abbey”—the deserted church, the mountain cottages, rough cliffs and hedge rows, the sound of mountain streams—are all the particulars of the picturesque. They are also the feature of the Wye Valley that Gilpin himself notes in 1782. Gilpin praises the “variety” between views containing both “steepest precipice” and “flattest meadow,” as well as moments when the ground “is *broken*,” such as by small rows of hedges (10). “Tintern Abbey” further features some Gothic darkness with its “dark sycamore” and vagrants and hermits sending in their silent “wreaths of smoke” “some uncertain notice” of their presence in the deep of the woods (18, 19). These too are aspects of the landscape previously praised by Gilpin: “the smoke, which is frequently seen issuing from the sides of the hills; and spreading its thin veil over a part of them, beautifully breaks their lines, and unites them with the sky” (12). Wordsworth even echoes the phrase “and unites them with the sky” when he writes that his thoughts “connect / The landscape with the quiet of the sky” (6-7).

In “Tintern Abbey,” whenever Wordsworth returns to an actual landscape it is a picturesque landscape. He remembers picturesque features of specific landscapes he encountered as a child—“the tall rock, / The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood” (77-78). Wordsworth hopes that his sister experiences just such a picturesque nature as he had as a child.

His benediction for her includes a picturesque portrayal of nature that calls forth appropriate picturesque conventions: “Therefore let the moon / Shine on thee in thy solitary walk; / And let the misty mountain-winds be free / To blow against thee” (134-37). Eventually, and with these picturesque views firmly embedded in her mind, Dorothy will be able to remember

That after many wanderings, many years  
Of absence, these steep woods and lofty cliffs,  
And this green pastoral landscape, were to me  
More dear, both form themselves and for thy sake! (156-59)

However, what Wordsworth hopes his sister remembers is not necessarily nature as it is, but the “steep woods and lofty cliffs” of a stylized landscape portrait.

Wordsworth in “Tintern Abbey,” one of his greatest works, is thoroughly grounded in picturesque theory. With this in mind, one can better investigate the implication and the accuracy of any claim linking Wordsworth and nature writ large, claims such as that made by Jonathan Bate, an originator of ecocriticism, when he writes, “The time is now right to allow Wordsworth to become once more what he imagined himself to be, what Shelley called him, and what he was to the Victorians: ‘Poet of Nature’” (9). To a degree, Shelley and Bate are correct—Wordsworth is a poet of nature. He immerses his verse in natural imagery and deliberates for a lifetime on the creative power of his mind as it is linked to nature. The same could be said of Thoreau. However, the nature that each encounters and creates in his writing multi-purpose, and sometimes it is staged or altered for no other reason than to make the Wye Valley or Walden Pond fit better a fashionable aesthetic defined by landscape painters. Which is to say, sometimes they just wanted their writing to improve on the views they had seen in order to present a better picture. The occasional picturesque portrayal is not all they were up to, but

the picturesque figures heavily in the formation of their artistic selves. In particular, it gave them a way to see, appreciate, and describe the natural, skills they honed throughout their careers.

The Lake District's Anglican Rocks and Climate Change at Walden Pond:  
The Cartography of William Wordsworth  
And Henry David Thoreau

A civil engineer is working alone on the shores of Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts. It is very early in the morning, before nearby residents are up and heading to work, before any pleasure seekers come to walk the shores of the popular pond for a moment of quiet inspiration, and this engineer, though burdened by his surveying equipment, works quickly and with purpose. Surveying in such a setting is tedious and physically demanding work. Sight lines must be created, and this requires trees to be felled and large paths of shrubs and other vegetation to be clear cut. To mark boundary corners, trees must either be notched with rectangular chunks hacked out of their trunks or charred by fire. Where no trees exist for these markers, large stones need to be collected from the shore or from older stone walls no longer in use to make sufficiently tall pyramids for a true reading. This engineer will work for several hours to clear brush, chop and mark trees, and gather stones, just to make the land ready for the survey. Once complete, this survey will be of great use to the town of Concord, allowing individual residents to know exactly what part of Walden Woods they own. Since home heating with carbon-based fuel like coal is expensive, not to mention dirty and unfashionable, owners of these plots of ground can then begin to chop down their trees for firewood.

Of course, this scenario is not presently occurring. Nor could it: Walden Pond and the woods surrounding it are protected from actions such as those described here, thanks to generations of conservationists inspired by the writing of Henry David Thoreau. *Walden* so well describes the pond and its importance to its author that such degradations of the land around it would be both offensive to consider and impossible to enact. As Patrick Chura argues, it is one

of the curiosities of history then that the civil engineer who facilitated some destruction of Walden Woods for commerce, and the author of *Walden* whose words have inspired legislation that precludes such offenses were one and the same individual. Chura describes the result of these conflicting images of Thoreau as “part and parcel to the long-term compromise with professional and material necessity that Thoreau’s surveying career entailed” (44). This “compromise” between professional obligations and a more idealized relationship with nature was not lost on Thoreau, who never suffered silently when it came to the realities of making a living. Concerning his survey work at Walden Pond, he notes in his journal:

I have lately been surveying the Walden woods so extensively and minutely that I now see it mapped in my mind’s eye—as, indeed, on paper—as so many men’s wood-lots, and am aware when I walk there that I am at a given moment passing from such a one’s wood-lot to such another’s. I fear this particular dry knowledge may affect my imagination and fancy, that it will not be easy to see so much wildness and native vigor there as formerly. No thicket will seem so unexplored now that I know that a stake and stones may be found in it. (10: 233)

Thoreau earned money by his surveys, even though the knowledge gained by these endeavors affected him negatively.

Likewise, though he nowhere mentions its effects on him with such detail, pencil making in his family’s factory, the other regular source of income throughout Thoreau’s life, must have brought with it a similar compromise. More so than surveying in fact, manufacturing pencils dramatically increased his family’s income and allowed them to move from the outskirts of Concord to a new home much closer to the center of town, giving Thoreau his own study for the first time in his life—a room of his own where he would both write on the inspiration of

wilderness and design a better engineering system for the pencils he helped to popularize.

Thoreau pencils were the most reliable and popular in the country for a time, and the amount of timber cut to make them must have been vast, not to mention the environmental cost accrued by mining for the pencils' graphite. Thoreau actively participated in these pursuits; besides redesigning the pencils themselves, he also discovered a process to refine the graphite so as to make a less greasy, sharper product, which held its point, an innovation which directly affected the popularity of the pencils and the profitability of the company. In *Walden*, Thoreau describes watching timber come by the trainload to Concord, where much of it surely was consumed for the Thoreau pencils: "Here goes the lumber from the Maine woods, which did not go out to sea in the last freset, risen four dollars on the thousand because of what did go out or what was split up; pine, spruce, cedar,—first, second, third and fourth qualities, so lately all of one quality, to wave over the bear, and moose, and caribou" (119-20). Thoreau's detailed knowledge of wood quality and types of timber, his precise awareness of cost as figured by price-per-thousand board feet, belies just how much the Thoreau family income depended on the removal of this wood, regardless of what the ecological impact might be.

But something is different for Thoreau when it comes to the wilderness of Maine as compared to the more cosmopolitan Concord, some tension pulled even tighter as he surveys around Walden Pond. After noting in his journal how his enjoyment of the woods around Walden, his very ability to see these woods, is compromised by his knowledge of it as "so many men's woodlots," he thinks of Maine, and how

[i]n these respects those Maine woods differed essentially from ours. [In Maine] you are never reminded that the wilderness which you are threading is, after all, some villager's familiar wood-lot from which his ancestors have sledded their



fuel for generations, or some widow's thirds, minutely described in some old deed, which is recorded, or which the owner has got a plan, too, and old bound marks may be found every forty rods if you will search. What a history this Concord wilderness which I affect so much may have had! . . . Some have cut it over three times during their lives. . . . All have renewed the bounds and reblazed the trees many times. [In the Maine woods] you are not reminded of these things. 'Tis true the map informs you that you stand on land granted by the State to such an academy, or on Bingham's Purchase, but these names do not impose on you, for you see nothing to remind you of the academy or of Bingham. (10: 233-34)

Thoreau acknowledges the degree to which he has "so much" affected the very face of Concord's landscape, an effect not seen in Maine, not even with intensive logging efforts, due to the vastness of its wilderness.

In this journal passage, Thoreau also gets to the heart of his objections about surveying. It is not that surveying is done and maps are made, but that it is done so completely and visibly; his surveys of Concord "impose" on his vision. The qualities found in maps—boundaries, elevations, directions, all used for the sake of commerce—hinder him from seeing nature any other way. His cartographic vision subverts any other type, and here Thoreau acknowledges the power of maps, their ability to "impose" on one's understanding of landscape. But maps, even ones drawn by Thoreau, have more than a merely personal significance for him. Thoreau realizes that once his surveys and his maps enter the public sphere they directly impact land-use decisions and become part of the narrative of Concord's political economy. Cartography is therefore not simply a filter for Thoreau to reflect on what he feels to be the spirit-deadening aspects of his necessary employment; instead, cartography is the locus where the personal and

the public, the profitable and the political, get transcribed, literally, on the natural world. This leads Thoreau to a paradox: surveying is his self-taught, expert skill, but at times he finds the resultant cartography is stultifying, so much so, in fact, that what readers see in *Walden* is a map-maker deeply invested in a project of deliberate unmapping.

Roughly three decades before Thoreau used the survey to engage in his cartographical project, on the other side of the Atlantic, Wordsworth finished his own exercise in guidebook writing for a very different exercise in cartography. Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* was a book more popular than his poetry was during his lifetime and one that had reached its fourth edition by 1853, having been first published in a much smaller version as early as 1810. It was a book Wordsworth revised consistently for the entire second half of his life (*Guide* xi). Like Thoreau's of Walden Pond, Wordsworth has a cartographical knowledge of England's Lake District. Thoreau's spatial understanding of Concord is primarily filtered through his surveying; however, Wordsworth comes to his expertise in cartographical knowledge through an understanding of geology, the scientific discipline with which he was the most familiar.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Thoreau, Wordsworth shows no evidence that he was conflicted about what he wanted the Lake District to be; nor is there evidence that his persona as poet conflicted with that of guidebook writer.

There is certainly no such conflict demonstrated toward the end of his life when he wrote two letters to *The Morning Post* protesting the proposed rail lines that, if completed, would be able to deposit tourists on the very banks of the lake at Windermere, letters mixing prose and poetry freely, as if his voice as poet gave validity to his concerns as resident. These letters offer

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<sup>1</sup> For book-length critical accounts of Wordsworth's scientific understanding emphasizing the emerging discipline of geology, see the studies of John Wyatt in *Wordsworth and the Geologists* and Noah Heringman in *Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology*. Wyatt and Heringman both make the point that, though not himself a geologist, Wordsworth was aware of and participated in geological debates throughout the course of his life.

a fascinating picture of Wordsworth's opinion of the function and importance of the Lake District at this time in his life, and one of their most consistent strategies is to figure the health of the Lake District as an indication of the health of the country as a whole.<sup>2</sup> In other words, in these letters one sees the national written in rhetoric of the natural. Sometimes this is done by emphasizing England's connection to its own history, as in Wordsworth's description of the twelfth-century church Furness Abbey: "Sacred as that relic of the devotion of our ancestors deserves to be kept, there are temples of Nature, temples built by the Almighty, which have still higher claim to be left unviolated" (*Guide* 145). Elsewhere in these letters Wordsworth's rewriting of nation into nature is figured through commerce, as Wordsworth posits that the "staple of the district is, in fact, its beauty and its character of seclusion and retirement" (*Guide* 136). Regardless of whether it is for the conservation of its staple "crop" of beauty or the need to preserve the ancient "temples of Nature" created by the hand of God, it is over the cause of the health of all of England that Wordsworth makes his case against the railways. These two letters were appended to Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* in 1906 by the text's first editor other than Wordsworth, Ernest de Selincourt, since according to de Selincourt himself, they "deal with subject kindred to the theme of the *Guide*" (*Guide* xi).

My reading of Wordsworth's *Guide* is one that presents it as a calculated cartographical project, in which what gets indelibly written onto the map is a rural, godly, and natural version of England itself—the nation in miniature form. Wordsworth's cartography is not marked by sight lines and elevations as Thoreau's is in his surveying, though there is some of that; rather, it is primarily a project of creative map-making—deciding what is included and what ignored; what

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<sup>2</sup> These letters present a very different attitude toward the tourism industry in the Lake District than does Wordsworth's poem "Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways" (1835) in which the poet is fascinated by the power these means of transportation have literally to bind the natural world.

is natural and what is foreign; who belongs to the land and who is excluded. Reading Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* through its cartography opens these questions in ways that are fruitful, and reading *Walden* as Thoreau's own version of a guidebook illuminates even further what aspects of their respective nations are in play for them when they actively map the land they inhabit.

Cartography is a discourse that defines and delineates an understanding of the physical world. Creating a cartographical representation of a physical place sets the parameters by which that place can be known. In this way, the very objectivity of cartography is its most creative feature; the landscape established through the survey or the guidebook is the land that is sanctioned as inherently knowable. Edward Casey finds that both cartography and landscape painting "are inextricably intertwined with the power relations of the society from which they stem, embodying its political beliefs and forces. . . . All of this is incontrovertibly the case and highly pertinent to the full understanding of any given map or landscape painting" (xvi). French cultural theorist Michel de Certeau goes further, making the case for a map's all-encompassing power of representation: "The map, a totalizing stage on which elements of diverse origin are brought together to form the tableau of a 'state' of geographical knowledge, pushes away into its prehistory or into its posterity . . . the operations of which it is the result or the necessary condition" (121). The cartography described in this chapter, like all cartography, has a totalizing function and the ability to make static and permanent a dynamic present.<sup>3</sup> Examining Thoreau's *Walden* and Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*, dissimilar as they may appear, through the lens of cartography's "totalizing stage," produces a reading that highlights each author's investment in creatively figuring the natural world.

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<sup>3</sup> For an insightful investigation of how cartography misleads, intentionally and accidentally, see Monmonier's *How to Lie with Maps* (1996).

Both Walden the pond and *Walden* the book are well-traveled terrain, and thinking about the text in terms of William Wordsworth, who has a similar topophilia for the landscape surrounding his home as well as similar conceptual concerns in some of his work, offers the rare opportunity to see *Walden* differently. How to make sense of *Walden* when reading it as a guidebook, with that genre's map-making and place-defining tradition, is one of the foundational questions of this chapter. On the other hand, Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* seems a simpler text to get at—it is, in a way, just what it says it is. Therefore, there exists the temptation to read it as if it were more transparent than it appears, and to get past this it is useful to filter it through *Walden*'s famous distortions of genre. Wordsworth's *Guide* is well established in the tradition of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century guidebooks and travel writing, and in fact consciously refashions these genres to an extent. This chapter, however, will examine it with something like Joseph Moldenhauer's eye for Thoreauvian paradox (the "dominant stylistic feature" of *Walden* [74]) or Laurence Buell's more recent figuration of *Walden* as "an aesthetic mongrel" (*Imagination* 200). Of primary concern in this chapter is how Wordsworth and Thoreau use their cartographic understanding of the natural world in their respective portrayals of one specific locale. Does Thoreau in *Walden* employ any Wordsworthian map-making strategies? Does Wordsworth in his *Guide* blend natural history classifications with the practice of myth-making as Thoreau so frequently does in *Walden*? Questions such as these are highlighted in the paired readings of this chapter in order to demonstrate that each text, through its various rhetorical maneuverings in the discourse of cartography—whether that discourse be informed by the survey in Thoreau's case or the guidebook and geology in Wordsworth's—ultimately undertakes a transformative project. Readers coming to the Lake District from Wordsworth's *Guide* or to Walden from Thoreau's text encounter landscapes that are always already figured for them,

mapped out in ways that make them impossible to be seen any other way. And, this chapter argues, one way to understand this transformation—from what one could see to what one does—is through the rhetorical uses of mapping found in each text.

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Wordsworth immediately announces the purpose for his guidebook in its first sentence: “it was the Author’s principal wish to furnish a Guide or Companion for the *Minds* of Persons of taste, and feeling for Landscape, who might be inclined to explore the District of the Lakes with that degree of attention to which its beauty may fairly lay claim” (27). His strategy is at once clear—there is a correct way to see and value nature; nature can not express this itself; it is, therefore, the author’s duty to instruct. The *Guide* is in this way a didactic project: Wordsworth is telling readers what he wants them to know about the Lake District while trying to maintain control over how they conceptualize it. Surprisingly perhaps, *Walden* begins in roughly the same spirit as the *Guide*, with a narrator who wishes to teach. In place of Wordsworth’s explanation that he writes for those of “taste,” Thoreau acknowledges that he too writes for a public. By his fourth sentence, Thoreau explains that “very particular inquiries” have been made “concerning [his] mode of life” at the pond; he simply writes to “answer some of these questions” (3).

Although they frame their narratives similarly in terms of instruction, after these brief introductions, the texts diverge in style and subject matter. After Wordsworth’s gentle admonition for the visitor to view nature properly, he immediately attends to the practical matter of getting one there: “for the more sure attainment, however, of this primary object [seeing nature correctly/having good taste], I will begin by undertaking the humble and tedious task of

supplying the Tourist with directions how to approach the several scenes in their best . . . order” (27). Though a reader may expect the narrator of *Walden* to lead them to the pond, in a manner perhaps similar to Wordsworth’s directions, Thoreau has other matters in mind, and it is not until the fortieth page of the first chapter that Thoreau turns his attention to the pond itself: “Near the end of March, 1845,” he begins (again), “I borrowed an axe and went down to the woods by Walden Pond, nearest to where I intended to build my house, and began to cut down some tall, arrowy white pines, still in their youth, for timber” (40).

The intervening pages of *Walden*—most all of the book’s first forty—have been concerned with what Thoreau has titled “Economy,” one of the book’s most famous chapters, which is indeed concerned with answering questions about how people live—just not Thoreau, who has undercut, at least in this chapter, his stated didactic aims. He writes that he will explain how he has lived at Walden, and subsequently details how others are failing to do so in Concord. This form of subversion, where Thoreau states one type of knowledge—here his personal knowledge of how he manages to get by—with another—how others do not—offers a template of how Thoreau presents his vision of the pond throughout *Walden*. Repeatedly, he gathers data about the pond, presenting it as an objective entity to be studied, measured, and surveyed, and then subverts the precision of this vision entirely with anecdote, mythology, or advice: he unmaps as he maps. As one would expect in an actual guidebook, Wordsworth is more direct, at least at first. Through the entire introductory chapter, “Directions and Information for the Tourist,” he continues organizing the view and leading the tour according to his good taste. However, one is not entirely sure what to make of this narrator. Should the reader be irritated at his condescension to supposed bad taste? Or, grateful that he is spending his time to help with a task he admittedly finds “tedious”? Unlike the elusive first chapter in *Walden*, the *Guide* proves

itself immediately more practical—more guidelike—by simply giving directions: “There are three approaches to the Lakes through Yorkshire; the least advisable is the great north road . . .” (27). The narrator presents the district here as landscape-on-map, with himself as expert guide, directing tourists down the most suitable roads.

Though condescending in tone, Wordsworth is filling a real (if “tedious”) need; in fact, one wants a guide who knows the land expertly enough to narrate it well. And this he does in prose that is mostly agreeable, generally having left his derision behind as he, with the reader, gets into the journey. “By all means,” he pleads, return from Furness Abbey by way of Urswick, “for the sake of the view from the top of the hill” (28); get a boat to see Windermere Lake for it “ought to be seen both from its shores and from its surface” as the other lakes do not “unfold so many fresh beauties to him who sails upon them” as does this one (30). Who would not want a path as calming and with as impressive views as those to be found by walking to Coniston across “the Sands from Lancaster” when one, because of the view, “seems to leave the turmoil and traffic of the world behind him; and, crossing the majestic plain whence the sea has retired, he beholds . . . the cluster of mountains among which he is going to wander, and towards whose recesses . . . he is gradually and peacefully led” (32)? These selections of text give an indication of how Wordsworth proceeds in the *Guide*, calmly and precisely, mapping out each lake and vale for his readers, not unlike tourist literature today, indicating how to get where you want to go and what to see when you arrive. This magisterial tone is necessary for Wordsworth, because through it, and by spending the first chapter giving directions as on a map, Wordsworth establishes the authority of his own voice in the *Guide*. He does this not by using his very solid understanding of geomorphology or his poetic imagination to refigure the landscape; instead, he



shows readers the map and gets them there, and in doing so gains their trust, which will be essential in his subsequent, and much more ambitious, chapters.

Despite their different paths, both Wordsworth and Thoreau, as guides, bring readers eventually to their chosen locations: Walden Pond is reached on page forty of *Walden* and Wordsworth's second chapter announces both its location and its aim clearly in its title, "Description of the Scenery of the Lakes." Here, however, the paths unexpectedly diverge again. Thoreau remains at the pond, narrating the landscape in a way one would expect in a guidebook:

The scenery of Walden is on a humble scale, and, though very beautiful, does not approach to grandeur . . . yet this pond is so remarkable for its depth and purity as to merit a particular description. It is a clear and deep green well, half a mile long and a mile and three quarters in circumference, and contains about sixty-one and a half acres; a perennial spring in the midst of pine and oak woods, without any visible inlet or outlet except by the clouds and evaporation. The surrounding hills rise abruptly from the water to the height of forty to eighty feet, though on the south-east and east they attain to about one hundred and one hundred and fifty feet respectively, within a quarter and a third of a mile. They are exclusively woodland. (175-76)

This description of the pond is a better cartographical representation of it than anything Wordsworth has supplied thus far in the *Guide*. Thoreau has provided a narrative version of the topographical map, noting elevations of hills as well as the specific type of trees covering them. These moments in *Walden* demonstrate just how the vision of the surveyor is put to use; they are descriptions worthy of any guidebook.

However, a reader of Wordsworth's text finds himself to be, immediately after Wordsworth's claim that he will presently give an overview of the region, remarkably, in Switzerland. He describes finding in Lucerne a "Model of the Alpine country" so large that a "[s]pectator ascends a little platform, and sees mountains, lakes, glaciers, rivers, woods, waterfalls, and valleys, with their cottages, and every other object contained in them, lying at his feet; all things being represented in their appropriate colours." This visual model of all the Alps spread at one's feet gives no small pleasure to Wordsworth: it is an "exquisite delight to the imagination, tempting it to wander at will from valley to valley, from mountain to mountain," but the highest pleasure comes not from these wanderings through Alpine scenic details. Instead what Wordsworth most appreciates is that this model allows him to see the Alps with "all its hidden treasures" both "sublime and beautiful" "comprehended and understood at once" (41). By giving pride of place to this Swiss model in his own guidebook, Wordsworth establishes his desire to reproduce the perspective and immediacy this model has created: he begins looking at a physical, three-dimensional model of the Alps which gives viewers an image of the Alpine whole and, returning to his lakes, replaces this with his guide. Since he can not provide his readers with such a physical model, nor can he even produce an actual map (as Thoreau will do for readers of *Walden*), Wordsworth is left to attempt a similarly overhead view of the entire Lake District, a view impossible to have been seen, of course, and one that will make sense of land, not as it is, but as it should be to those with "taste." In this passage, as in the *Guide* itself, he is attempting a sort of cartographical slight of hand, the effect of which will be to efface the Alps, as rendered by actual map, with the Lake District, as rendered by his narrative.

This was not the first time Wordsworth responded to the Alps in his writing by turning to the possibilities of his own imagination, nor the first time the Alps had figured prominently in a

text supposedly about his love of England's smaller hills and lakes. In the Gondo Gorge episode of book six of *The Prelude*, one of the most emblematic, interpreted, and well-known literary passages in Romanticism, Wordsworth tells of how, while in the Alps on a walking tour with Robert Jones, he and Jones became lost, met a peasant, realized their mistaken path, and learned that, as they are henceforth to head downward, they had already "*crossed the Alps*" (6: 591). This passage is relevant here as it offers a useful parallel to this discussion of the *Guide*; it is essentially an interruption of a travel narrative, the story of Wordsworth and Jones as tourists, and it is a move Wordsworth repeated decades later in his *Guide*. His emotional response to the news that the Alps are at that moment more behind him than ahead of him, and all that thus remains is descent, gives his spirits a "melancholy slackening" (6: 617), but when composing the text and relating this story he intervenes in his own narrative and makes two famous and related rhetorical moves.

The first follows immediately the revelation that he and Jones have crossed the Alps at Simplon Pass and is celebratory, lauding Wordsworth's own creative power by giving it a name, "Imagination," and acknowledgement, "I recognize thy glory" (6: 592, 599). This practice, the naming and acknowledgment of his individual imagination, here given sacramental power, is immediately followed by Wordsworth's second response to the very real disappointment they find in their Alpine journey. He tests his just-named imagination immediately—working to recover that which should have been self-evident to begin with. Pulling from contemporary geological theory as well as Milton's depiction of God in *Paradise Lost* (Jonathan Wordsworth, Abrams, and Gill 218n), Wordsworth's follows the Simplon Pass passage with a depiction of what he sees in Gondo Gorge—nature with cataclysmic power:

The immeasurable height

Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,  
 The stationary blasts of waterfalls,  
 And everywhere along the hollow rent  
 Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,  
 The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,  
 The rocks that muttered close upon our ears—  
 Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside  
 As if a voice were in them—the sick sight  
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,  
 The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,  
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,  
 Were all like the working of one mind, the features  
 Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,  
 Characters of the great apocalypse,  
 The types and symbols of eternity,  
 Of first, and last, and midst, and without end. (6: 556-72)

Wordsworth's poetry here provides the moment of sublimity denied to him at Simplon Pass.

One could argue that since Wordsworth, as tourist, did not have the type of guide he provides to readers in his own guidebook—no one to say, “Stop. Go this way. Look here or you'll miss it”— he is forced to name and actualize his own imagination, and then set it upon a landscape that was not the primary goal of the trip, but one he must make suffice. His guidebooks and guides both fail him and my reading of this passage places Wordsworth's

imaginative power as filling in the gap between expectation and experience.<sup>4</sup> If all moments of chaos (“rocks that muttered,” a “sick sight,” “winds thwarting winds”) and oxymorons (“stationary blasts,” “decaying, never to be decayed,” “clear blue sky...unfettered clouds,” “tumult and peace,” “darkness and . . . light”) can be held in “the workings of one mind,” one must wonder if Wordsworth is here referring to the divine mind or to the poet’s, who after all has just demonstrated how “one mind,” or one “Imagination,” can figure just such a representation of “Eternity.”

It is this power of the creative imagination that is essential to the *Guide*. *The Prelude* points to what is at stake in literally being able to figure one’s self in landscape—how reading the land incorrectly can create a gap incomprehensible in one’s journey—and, conversely, illustrates the power of the individual imagination in its ability to figure that landscape. Even more important in terms of this discussion of the *Guide*, *The Prelude* offers an example of Wordsworth responding to the Alps, the exemplar of the sublime in European thought at the time, as creative potentiality where he can figure the local in terms of subliminal discourse.<sup>5</sup> The map proposed in the *Guide* will require a substantial act of imagination to create since Wordsworth does not suggest actually constructing “something of this kind”—a three-dimensional model—since it “would only confuse and embarrass” (41). Instead, to get at the

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<sup>4</sup> This gap has famously been filled for Wordsworth many, many times—beginning, actually, with his own insertion of “Imagination” taking the place in his manuscript of the simile of the cave (Jonathan Wordsworth, Adams, and Gill 216). Later, Alan Liu finds history and Napoleon in this gap (23-31), in his response to Geoffrey Hartman who finds apocalypse (17).

<sup>5</sup> Mont Blanc looms large, literally and figuratively, in European discourse of the sublime. This peak, tallest in the Alps, was first ascended in 1786, and it inspired two of the greatest minds of the age, Percy Shelley and Humphrey Davy, to write poems about it. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was inspired by German poet Frederika Brun’s poem on this mountain that he translated it, without crediting her, as the basis for his “Hymn before Sunrise, in the Vale of Chamouni,” on which Shelley based parts of “Mont Blanc.”

“main outlines” of the Lake District, Wordsworth asks for a reader’s trust, a trust established in his introductory chapter,

requesting him to place himself with me, in imagination, upon some given point, let it be the top of either of the mountains, Great Gavel, or Scawfell; or rather; let us suppose our station to be a cloud hanging midway between those two mountains, at not more than half a mile’s distance from the summit of each, and not many yards above their highest elevation. (41-42)<sup>6</sup>

Wordsworth’s unattainable vantage point contains the language of “imagination” as well as a more scientific hypothesizing—his “let us suppose”—which can be read as a thought experiment in which Wordsworth proposes a hypothesis and works through its ramifications. Wordsworth’s specific thought experiment places a reader on an imaginary perch and then describes in great detail the resulting picture of land beneath the cloud.<sup>7</sup>

For readers though, it is the imagination that is ultimately required here; they are not getting a view from an isolated and difficult to access part of Great Gavel or Scawfell, locations dedicated readers may be able to reach on their own with a good map, but instead they are led to a place that is physically impossible to access. This invented cloud-perch, hovering at some “midway” point, is not even someplace the author has reached—he has not climbed any mountain, taken any flight, gone up in any balloon. In his experiment with spatial boundaries he just makes it up, out of thin air, as it were. But the view from this place is wonderfully

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<sup>6</sup> For more detail on this passage of the *Guide* and its relationship to aesthetic theory, see Kelley’s *Wordsworth’s Revisionary Aesthetics*, especially pages 13-23.

<sup>7</sup> Though not a term coined in his lifetime, the “thought-experiment” had been practiced by scientists from at least the time of Galileo (Brown), and thinking of the perspective of a cloud between Great Gavel and Scawfell in these terms reminds us that the act of imagining landscape can in itself be a way of thinking through larger problems than would be assumed to be the province of guidebooks.

described, and if readers recoil at all from the idea of hanging on a made-up cloud, they quickly are calmed by the narrator's commanding, cartographical prose: "we shall see stretched at our feet a number of valleys, not fewer than eight, diverging from the point, on which we are supposed to stand, like spokes from the nave of a wheel" (42). Wordsworth figures the entire Lake District as a wagon wheel from the center of which its valleys extend. Placing himself in the middle, he also creates a vantage point that cannot be accessed without him; the traveler's perspective of the landscape from this viewpoint is necessarily Wordsworthian.

The word "nave" in this passage adds another potential complexity as it does not simply mean the center of a circle but, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it is also "the main body or part of a church building." The first meaning most obviously fits Wordsworth's description of his vantage point, but it should be considered that Wordsworth may intend both, especially when realizing that he uses the image of the entry to a church elsewhere as an essential metaphor for his never-completed masterpiece, *The Recluse*. In his "Preface" to *The Excursion*, he compares the relationship of *The Prelude* to *The Recluse* to the relationship "the ante-chapel has to the body of a gothic church" (589). This consideration offers a parallel to define further Wordsworth's mapping in the *Guide*. Wordsworth presents the Lake District to visitors from a vantage point that cannot be reached, with a metaphor of a wheel that unnaturally presents the District as a sealed whole, and through a religious symbol that encourages reverence in visitors who enter the Lake District as they would a church.<sup>8</sup> Like replacing Simplon Pass with his imagination's Gondo Gorge, he here replaces the model of the Alps at Lucerne with an

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Kroeber in his article "'Home at Grasmere': Ecological Holiness" makes the case that Wordsworth does something very similar in terms of the linguistic creation of a self-sustaining unity of place in the Lake District in the poem "Home at Grasmere": "The perfect spherical enclosure of the vale embodies the possibility of a wholeness of life, a joining of the psychic with the physical, of past with future in the present" (134).

imaginative tour de force, immediately enclosing and sanctifying the Lake District through a perspective all his own. Wordsworth's *Guide* seems more an imaginative project than one would expect; it employs cartography creatively, pushing the definition of the guidebook towards something that transforms, not something that describes.

*Walden*, however, once the text settles at the pond itself, continues to read very much like a guidebook, a fact not necessarily surprising given Thoreau's knowledge of surveying.<sup>9</sup> Not only is all the land described in *Walden* owned privately (though never by Thoreau) and Thoreau's cabin built on Emerson's woodlot, but Thoreau was also routinely hired to solve ownership disputes over various plots of land around the pond (Maynard 130). Thoreau's map-knowledge gained from surveying brings with it, welcome or not, a foundational understanding of the pond and this understanding is well represented in *Walden*. In fact, each revision of this text—like each subsequent edition of Wordsworth's *Guide*—demonstrates better representational ability in terms of scientific accuracy, particularly the version of 1849 when, after a two and a half year hiatus, Thoreau again expands the text after reading Darwin, Linnaeus, Gilpin, and Cato (Richardson 265). Of significant interest to him is exactly how deep the pond is, as the folk wisdom of the day rumored it to be bottomless. The map Thoreau creates and publishes with the text of *Walden* registers Walden Pond's depth at various spots, and Thoreau states that he "was desirous to recover the long lost bottom of" the pond and to this end "surveyed it carefully" in order to refute the "many stories told about the bottom, or rather no bottom" (285). Thoreau presents these measurements with precision and describes his methods of ascertaining the depths to "assure my readers that Walden has a reasonably tight bottom at a not unreasonable, though an

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<sup>9</sup> Ron Broglio's study of Wordsworth's *Guide* links the guidebook and the survey by the type of objectifying work they do. "The surveyor or tourist," for Broglio, "seems to gain an objective representation of space without the interference of engagement with the terrain." Broglio also finds "many instances in which the surveyor's map and tour guide overlap in their transformation of the land to landscape" (72, 73).



unusual depth” (287). To do so, Thoreau describes his method—“I fathomed it easily with a cod-line and a stone weighing about a pound and a half, and could tell accurately when the stone left the bottom, by having to pull so much harder before the water got underneath to help me”—as well as his result—“the greatest depth was exactly one hundred and two feet” (287).

His measurements, though, do not end here; after mapping “the pond by the scale of ten rods to an inch” and completing all his “soundings, more than a hundred in all,” he offers measurements of three of the five coves of the pond, which “were observed to have a bar quite across their mouths and deeper water within, so that the bay tended to be an expansion of water within the land not only horizontally but vertically, and to form a basin or independent pond” (289). Thoreau’s precise measurements present an accurate picture of the pond and disprove faulty local theories such as the one concerning the pond’s depth, or the one held by a factory owner who, because of his knowledge of dams, says that the bottom of Walden cannot be as steeply angled as Thoreau claims since sand will not lie at such an angle—a theory untrue, Thoreau explains, since “the deepest ponds are not so deep in proportion to their area as most suppose, and, if drained, would not leave very remarkable valleys” (287). This factory owner, it seems, has made a category mistake, likening ponds to dams, and Thoreau is as confident in correcting this viewpoint as he is in ascertaining exactly the depth of Walden Pond and its coves. Therefore, once he finally reaches the pond, Thoreau maps it as though he were surveying it. He measures its depth and breadth and sets the pond topographically in its surrounding hills.

Where Thoreau provides a map as well as a number of precise corresponding details of the pond itself, Wordsworth mediates a reader’s understanding of the Lake District by filtering the view through Alpine models and imagined perspectives. In this sense at least, Wordsworth’s *Guide to the Lakes* is much more like the *Walden* readers have come to expect with its attendant

genre bending and slippery uses of natural descriptions; and *Walden* itself seems to be a rather reliable guidebook, with a map included, fulfilling the role Wordsworth claimed for his own *Guide*—that it was intended for those “who might be inclined to explore . . . with that degree of attention to which its beauty may fairly lay claim” (*Guide* 27). Of course, displaying the cartographical knowledge required to place readers in their environment is only one of the functions of each of these texts, only one discipline of measurement and categorization that one could bring to bear on a landscape. After all, cartography may not be the best way to know a landscape, and both the *Guide* and *Walden* are rich in other types of discourse that can supplement a cartographical understanding of place.

For example, Wordsworth identifies the type of rock which comprises the mountains in the Lake District. When describing different types of soil found among the hills, both fertile and rocky, he writes,

the soil is laid bare by the torrents and burstings of water from the sides of the mountain in heavy rains; and not unfrequently their perpendicular sides are seamed by ravines . . . which, meeting in angular points, entrench and scar the surface with numerous figures like the letters W and Y. In the ridge that divides Eskdale from Wastdale, granite is found; but the Mountains are for the most part composed of the stone by mineralogists called schist, which, as you approach the plain country gives place to lime-stone and free-stone; but schist being the substance of the mountains, the predominant *colour* of the *rocky* parts is bluish, or hoary gray. . . . With this blue or grey colour is frequently intermixed a red tinge, proceeding from the iron that interveins the stone. (45)

This is geologically sophisticated knowledge, and though Wordsworth is still able to maintain his cartographical commitment to the Lake District as a whole, shown by his comments on the ridges between particular valleys, his eyes meanwhile are also on the ground, noting the very hue of the rock at his feet. In fact, knowledge of a region's geography often is a prerequisite to obtaining a good map.<sup>10</sup> Geological mapping was, at the time, in demand and figured into many economic decisions and philosophical debates since a reliable geological survey could guide one to coal, direct the digging for canals and railroads, and even give a date to the very creation of the planet.

For all his scientific expertise, Thoreau is no geologist. After taking remarkably accurate measurements of the dimensions of the pond and situating it with precision among the surrounding hills, Thoreau returns to give a second overview of the pond, this one concerning its origin. This description is significantly less detailed than Wordsworth's analysis of the Lake District's rock formation, and, as the following passage shows, it is the type of metaphoric use of the pond for which *Walden* is famous:

I have said that Walden has no visible inlet nor outlet, but it is on the one hand distantly and indirectly related to Flint's Pond, which is more elevated, by a chain of small ponds coming from that quarter, and on the other directly and manifestly to the Concord River, which is lower, by a similar chain of ponds through which in some other geological period it may have flowed, and by a little digging, which God forbid, it can be made to flow thither again. If by living thus reserved and

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<sup>10</sup> Wordsworth was, according to Wyatt, "remarkably accurate" in recording physical features which "became accepted indicators of continental glaciation" (*Geologists* 25), and the 1843 version of the *Guide* contains three letters on Lake District geology from geologist William Sedgwick. As early as the 1820 *Guide* "Wordsworth is being more precise and closer to the mineralogical orthodoxy" (Wyatt, *Geologists* 22).

austere, like a hermit in the woods, so long, it has acquired such wonderful purity, who would not regret that the comparatively impure waters of Flint's Pond should be mingled with it, or itself should ever go to waste its sweetness in the ocean wave? (194)

Not only is Thoreau unsure of the origin of Walden's waters (the Concord river "may" have connected it to a small series of ponds, but then again, maybe not), he is also unconcerned about this. What matters here, unlike in Wordsworth's precise descriptions of the color of Lake District rock, is the "wonderful purity" of the pond, which would be compromised, of course, if Thoreau could identify the source of its water. If Walden is the purest of ponds, then following Thoreau's logic, it is best not to be too curious about where its water comes from; whatever the source, it is less pure, for metaphoric purposes, than its destination. If, in terms of cartography, Wordsworth was a less trustworthy narrator than was to be found in *Walden*, when dealing with the formation of the actual natural phenomena, Wordsworth is much more precise.

Wordsworth too comments on purity of water: he notes that among his "minuter recommendations will be noticed, especially along bays exposed to the setting-in of strong winds, the curved rim of fine blue gravel, thrown up in course of time by the waves, half of it perhaps gleaming from under the water, and the corresponding half of a lighter hue" (51). The water of the Lake District must be pure if blue gravel can be seen through it, and Wordsworth evokes a concrete image of the darker "hue" even clear water gives to rocks, but as convincing readers of the metaphoric purity of lakes is not his objective, he lets it go at this. Wordsworth is content to describe the water as it appears, and he follows this with a note about the kinds of birds that are to be found along the shores: herons, widgeons, goldings, and swans. Unlike in his

mapping, these things do not have to carry the burden of anxiety found in comparisons to Switzerland or in the need to establish a perhaps too-perfect geographic unity of the region.

At Walden, all such details are of symbolic importance. As in the case of the pickerel, “[a]h, the pickerel of Walden!”—they are “fabulous fishes” and “rare,” unlike any fish Thoreau knows due to their “dazzling and transcendent beauty which separates them by a wide interval from the cavernous cod and haddock whose fame is trumpeted in our streets” (284). To describe them, Thoreau begins by saying exactly what they are not like—“not green like the pines, nor gray like the stones, nor blue like the sky; yet they have to my eyes, if possible, yet rarer colors, like flowers and precious stones, as if they were like pearls.” From here, he employs another category of scientific knowledge to describe the fish—they are “the animalized *nuclei* or crystals of the Walden water”—calling on his fluency in early biology to provide the reader with an image of the fish sparkling in the water, nearly translucent, as the very center of the pond. This picture of the pickerel is then immediately undercut: “They, of course, are Walden all over and all through; are themselves small Waldens in the animal kingdom, Waldenses” (284).

Metonymy has replaced symbolism and the fish are no longer fish of the pond, but they are the pond—so much so in fact that they have their own scientific classification: Waldenses. Or could this be a new name for a species of pond that glimmers like pickerel? Though readers may be unsure whether Waldenses are pond or fish, through this description they must know each in ways that emphasize Walden Pond’s distinct purity.

Both Wordsworth’s *Guide* and Thoreau’s *Walden* are consistently inconsistent. Thoreau has led readers to Walden Pond with great detail and precision, even drawing a map with accurate depth readings; Wordsworth takes readers to the Lake District from the Swiss Alps and phantom clouds. Backing up, Thoreau remaps the pond as an isolated and pure haven in the

woods, a place whose origin he is unconcerned to determine; Wordsworth accurately situates his hills within the framework of the geological processes of rock formation. Once at their respective destinations, Thoreau looks down at the water and sees fish, which are like pearls, which are like nuclei, which are like the water (again? still?), while Wordsworth sees . . . some swans. It seems that regardless of whether his cartography comes from geology or from years of surveying, the last thing either writer is concerned with is consistent, accurate representation, as one might hope to find in a map or a guidebook. At certain times, in fact, the question arises as to whether the creation of an accurate map is possible at all, perhaps a foundational question to consider when it comes to the reputation of each individual as nature writer. *The Guide to the Lakes* and *Walden* are not works that are descriptive; they are prescriptive. Of course, they correspond to real places (real in the sense that one can go there and find a place to park), but, as places, they embody values which the authors instill. It is through Wordsworth's and Thoreau's rhetorical flourishes of cartography in these texts that these places are created for readers. Meaning is coming through the authors, filtered by these places, not, as is commonly believed, from the places themselves as witnessed and documented by the authors.

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Of the two works, Wordsworth's *Guide* is the more transparently prescriptive. After all, Wordsworth bluntly titles a chapter of it "Changes, and Rules of Taste for Preventing their Bad Effects." He explains that "all gross transgressions" against taste come from the well-intentioned, if misguided, attempts to organize the landscape according to one "perception of order, regularity, and contrivance" (79). In general, this desire for order and regularity is one

that Wordsworth celebrates, and he spends much of the *Guide* showing how one can “contrive” the land in a way that is more natural, more like nature, echoing the discussion of the picturesque in the previous chapter. In other words, he does not object to contrivances or manipulations of the landscape; instead he bemoans that they are done to ill effect. In this way, the seemingly antithetical ideas of contrived and naturalized are yoked together for one purpose through much of the body of the *Guide*. The important aesthetic for Wordsworth is not what is natural, but what so appears: “The principle that ought to determine the position, apparent size, and architecture of a house . . . as to admit of its being gently incorporated into the scenery of Nature—should also determine its colour,” Wordsworth explains, and in doing so posits home construction as a simple question of “gentle incorporation” into landscape (83). White as a home color is therefore unacceptable in this natural aesthetic unless it is in a “native cottage” where “the glare of whitewash has been subdued by time and enriched by weather-stains” or in a “small white building, embowered in trees” in those “rare and solitary instances” where it “sparkles from the midst of a thick shade” (84).

Wordsworth, of course, understands the inclination to paint homes white since with this color “the mere aspect of cleanliness and neatness thus given . . . to the whole face of the country, produces moral associations [that are] powerful” (84). The problem is, simply, that bright white is not natural—unless of course by age or surrounding foliage it is made more so. White distracts the eye away from the greater scenery and detracts from the landscape: “a single white house” can “materially impair the majesty of a mountain;” “[f]ive or six white houses, scattered over a valley, by their intrusiveness, dot the surface, and divide it into triangles, or other mathematical figures, haunting the eye, and disturbing the repose” (85). What Wordsworth wants are natural constructions: “humble dwellings [that] remind the contemplative spectator of

a production of Nature, and can . . . rather be said to have grown than to have been erected;— to have risen, by an instinct of their own, out of the native rock” (70). Therefore, the proper color of Lake District buildings is “commonly called stone colour,” something “between a cream and a dust-colour” (86). Wordsworth explains in a note some pertinent details of the painting process that help get the “natural” color just right— “[i]t is best that the colouring material should be mixed with the rough-cast, and not laid on as a *wash* afterwards” (86, n.1)—indicating that the natural aesthetic can be mixed in a paint. However, as Wyatt notes, it is Wordsworth’s scientific fluency that adds legitimacy to these specifics in his color terminology for rocks, as his analysis of rocks and their color throughout the *Guide* shows him writing as “confidently as any mineralogist,” linking processes like oxidation and weather staining with human additions like the painting of homes (*Geologists* 40). The ideology behind Wordsworth’s creation of the Lake District consistently makes it look more like nature.

But what is the ideology informing Thoreau? Does he hope to create a pond that is “made deep and pure for a symbol” (285) or one that is a pickerel? Or a nucleus, or flowing from nearby Flint’s pond, or a retreat from society, or a gathering place for friends, or ancient, or forever young, or just a pond that happens to be 102 feet deep? All these ways of figuring Walden Pond are made clear in the text of *Walden*, so what features are emphasized when figuring it as a Wordsworthian guidebook? A text containing precision with contradiction, playfulness with mythic seriousness, a forced determination not to be a guidebook? (Thoreau “does not simply allow for disagreement; he encourages it,” Michael Fisher argues convincingly [104].) Some of his most precise measurements culminate in the accurate map of the pond described previously with over fifty separate measurements of its depth, leading Thoreau to an exciting realization: the deepest part of the pond can be approximated by locating where the lines



measuring its length and breadth cross. This seems to thrill him as he emphasizes the word “exactly” when describing where these lines meet and noting the discovery is much to his “surprise.” Nevertheless, he discards the pond itself to make the greater point that this observation

of the pond is no less true in ethics. It is the law of average. Such a rule of the two diameters not only guides us toward the sun in the system and the heart in man, but draw lines through the length and breadth of the aggregate of a man’s particular daily behaviors and waves of life into his coves and inlets, and where they intersect will be the height or depth of his character. (291)

The cartographical knowledge brought to the pond is useful as far as it creates a symbol; likewise his discovery of crossing lines (which is, as one might guess, an invalid way for discerning the deepest point of a body of water), also described with a surveyor’s accuracy, makes a worthy metaphor for the character of a person.

In his journal, Thoreau wonders of Walden Pond, “Who would have suspected so large and cold and thick-skinned a thing to be so sensitive? Yet it has its law to which it thunders obedience when it should as surely as the buds expand in the spring. The earth is all alive and covered with papillæ. The largest pond is as sensitive to atmospheric changes as the globule of mercury in its tube” (302). The pond’s largeness, coldness, and the thickness of its skin are what Thoreau takes pains to survey and relate in *Walden*, as he has not only found its depth but also kept track of the day of each year when the ice has melted from its surface. But these measurable, mapable details are subverted for the concept of a living pond, which is itself subverted for the idea of a living earth. These questions of shifting significance and elusive

intention mark generations of Thoreau criticism generally, and, it would seem, trying to get at *Walden* through its use of the rhetoric of mapping similarly baffles.

Thoreau explains in a journal entry that “[m]an cannot afford to be a naturalist, to look at Nature directly, but only with the side of his eye. He must look through and beyond her. To look at her is as fatal as to look at the head of Medusa. It turns the man of science to stone. I feel that I am dissipated by so many observations” (5: 45). In order to avoid responding to nature as a stone, as a lifeless scientist, he has mapped the pond but keeps the details of this map peripheral yet present. He claims that “through and beyond” nature is a truer nature informed by science but not bound by it, a living world for which science alone is an insufficient register. The knowledge gained by cartography, as well as by natural history, is sublimated to a slipperiness of a constantly shifting perspective, or as Thoreau himself puts it, his many attempts to link his “facts with fable” (184). For all the scientific attention given the pond in *Walden*, readers know very little about it by the book’s closing proclamation that “the sun is but a morning star” (333).

It should not be forgotten, however, that Wordsworth too has mixed some fables with his facts; after all, Wordsworth does not, and perhaps cannot, rely on his geological knowledge to map the Lake District as a bounded and holy place—for this he uses a wagon wheel and cloud with some assistance from the Alps. But he does, very much, want to guide. From the outset, he has deliberately told readers how to see and how to think. He continues this throughout, following the same rhetorical pattern with a consistency more noticeable because of *Walden*’s lack of one—relying on his scientific knowledge insofar as it helps his cause and abandoning it when it does not. After his prescriptions for house color he takes on “the management of the grounds and plantations”: they too should look “gently incorporated with the works of Nature,”

nearly repeating by word his preference for the color of buildings (86). In terms of vegetation, Wordsworth campaigns not against color, but species, and here he allows for the slightest of exceptions: a few “exotic plants” may be introduced “provided they be confined almost to the doors of the house” (87). But nature (native species only), must be the pervading aesthetic, and he praises native plants, flowers, shrubs, and trees as well as the natural processes that govern their growth and spread. “[H]olly, broom, wild-rose, elder, dogberry, white and black thorn” are acceptable shrubs; for flowering fruit trees, “the wilding, black cherry tree, and wild cluster-cherry . . . may be happily admitted as an intermediate link between the shrubs and the forest trees”; and, for these forest trees, the birch and Scotch fir are the most suitable (87).<sup>11</sup>

Putting all these pieces together helps determine just what sort of place Wordsworth is working to establish, and it is one that is no more “natural” than Thoreau’s theory about figuring depth through intersecting lines is accurate. In addition to being roughly in the shape of a circle, bounded as if by a wagon wheel, best seen from a location inaccessible save through the prose of Wordsworth himself, and akin to the entrance of a chapel, it also has dwellings the color of rock and plantings that are historically significant. With set borders, religious affiliation, and links both to history and nature, what readers actually come to know through Wordsworth’s text is a separate country, one much like a mythic and miniature England itself, such perhaps as described in William Blake’s *Milton*: “England’s green and pleasant land.” We find nature, as it is figured through Wordsworth’s map of the Lake District, as nation. All of the natural details Wordsworth has included in the *Guide*—the house color, the vegetation, the bounded circle—give a texture to the place that invites readers to feel its singular identity. Political geographers note how this is the strategy of anyone wishing “to construct relatively large scale political entities.”

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<sup>11</sup> Of the two men, Thoreau should be considered more advanced in botanical expertise; however, Wordsworth’s knowledge of his native flora too was expert, as these passages indicate.

Cartographers “cannot simply draw lines on a map and produce [these entities] from nothing. They make concerted efforts to give these territories histories and identities in order to make them more place-like and therefore more intelligible to their designated populations” (Cresswell 102). Wordsworth’s mapping project has been just this—an effort to make the Lake District “more place-like,” more distinctive, and therefore “more intelligible.”

One cannot read Wordsworth’s description of the flora of the Lake District and not think of Thoreau’s great metaphor at the end of the “Spring” chapter of *Walden*, where he reads the melting sand of Deep Cut as reflecting all life as found in one great leaf. Readers must approach this passage with caution as it is, like the “Imagination” passage of *The Prelude*, foundational and, to use the language of guidebooks, a very well worn path. However, it is useful to consider briefly here because just by cataloging all of the disciplines Thoreau utilizes in his descriptions of this sandy mud, one can get a fuller picture of the type of scientific knowing Thoreau had access to when his attention turned away from surveys and maps. Biology is well represented as the flowing sand looks much like “the lacinated lobed and imbricated thalluses of some lichens” (305) and in the sand one might “see perchance how blood vessels are formed” (307); Thoreau makes reference to the physical sciences, noting a link between internal processes and external observations that “the atoms have already learned” (306); a facility in linguistics and etymology is displayed in his lists of all the words related to “*lobe*,” namely “*λείβω*, *labor*, *lapsus*, to flow or slip downward, a lapsing; *λοβος*, *globus*, lobe, globe; also lap, flap, and many other words” as well as their pronunciation—“the radicals of lobe are *lb*, the soft mass of the *b* . . . with a liquid *l* behind it pressing it forward” (306); his reference to “stratum upon stratum” of “fossil earth” and “stalactite” (309, 308) show comfort in geological discourse as well.

These different strands of science are all present, but, in a process seen in his map-making as well, they are blended in a way that undercuts their precision as separate disciplines in order to access what for Thoreau must be greater concerns—be they pond or planet or humankind. The sand pooling at the bottom of Deep Cut is a “kind of foliage” warranting its own names: “sand foliage,” “luxuriant foliage,” “foliaceous mass,” “sandy overflow.” His blending of sand and plant in these descriptions leads to his observation that in sand “the overhanging leaf sees here its prototype.” So, in sand there is the beginning of leaf, but he also finds that the leaves are simply larger “feathers and wings of birds.” Hence, through a sort of Thoreauvian transitive property—not unlike the way he describes the pickerel—“you pass from the lumpish grub in the earth to the airy and fluttering butterfly” through the always present form of a leaf. He makes his sublimation of scientific discourse explicit now, fully acknowledging the importance of transformation and redefinition to his understanding of Walden Pond. He here comes to terms with the world itself: “the very globe continually transcends and translates itself, and becomes winged in its orbit. . . . The whole tree itself is but one leaf, and rivers are still vaster leaves whose pulp is intervening earth, and towns and cities are the ova of insects in the axils” (306-07).

In the botanical minutiae—the pulp and veins and lobes—of leaves, Thoreau has found cities and towns, but he begins again immediately after this with the warmth brought by the dawn of a new day which creates a renewed thaw: “the sun withdraws” and the “sand ceases to flow,” he notes as he restarts the pattern, “but in the morning the streams will start once more,” and this time what he sees in the running sand is not plant life but animal: “You here see perchance how blood vessels are formed” and as the day grows warmer, the sand thaws more quickly forming a “meandering channel or artery.” He too sees in “the siliceous matter”

“perhaps the bony system, and in the still finer soil and organic matter the fleshy fire or cellular tissue,” prompting one of his more famous questions: “What is man but a mass of thawing clay?” In answering, he continues, “The ball of the human finger is but a drop congealed. The fingers and toes flow to their extent from the thawing mass of the body” (307). In the sand thaw near Walden Pond, Thoreau famously finds a blueprint for the world—“[t]his one hillside” shows to him “the principle of all the operations of Nature.” What he most certainly has not provided, quite amazingly considering the amount of description, is any sort of visual image of this embankment: readers get no color, shape, size, or proportion of Deep Cut. Thoreau seemingly has no desire to present an image of this feature of the landscape surrounding Walden Pond. When Wordsworth utilizes his maps to create the Lake District as he wants it, he consistently molds the place. He is, after all, prescribing some version of the landscape, accurate or not. Thoreau allows no such concrete reassurance. If readers turn to Thoreau as a guide they get one who refuses to lead and a cartographer who erases his lines as he draws them. An essential question of the chapter remains: just what kind of guidebook is *Walden*?

To answer, it is useful to return to the idea of the thought experiment. This chapter previously considered the potential usefulness of thinking of Wordsworth as an experimenter with ideas of landscape, but in the case of Thoreau, there is no need to wonder about the implications of him as experimenter, as he claims that very title for himself. As he begins his narrative at the pond, having moved in on July fourth, he states that he will presently “make haste to my own experiment” (40). Seen in this light, *Walden* does not describe a thought experiment, it is an actual one. As a guidebook, *Walden* seems to prescribe that readers experience nature as Thoreau does—his embodiment of the thought experiment is meant, very literally, to encourage readers to follow in his footsteps. “Experiments succeed,” Michael Fisher

argues, “when others can duplicate them, and this is what Thoreau is trying to encourage in his readers—not necessarily to repeat what he has done but to do something similar” (106).

Certainly, others critics have looked at *Walden* as a text that encourages behavior change in readers. Thoreau intentionally parodies the entire genre of guidebooks, according to a reading of *Walden* by Leonard Neufeldt, who traces the history and function of a different type of guidebook, the genre of nineteenth-century conduct books for young men. Though emphasizing models of behavior and not models of nature, these books as described by Neufeldt were intended to affect positively the behaviors of their readers. That Thoreau writes a parody of them helps to understand the way *Walden* both engages with modeling behavior and strenuously avoids such claims, which according to Henry Golemba allows it to be “forever familiar, forever new” (216). On the other hand, Golemba also points out that Thoreau might have more intended *Walden* to change thinking than to change behavior:

Every reader is a “robber reader.” Even the most sincere and well-intentioned who attempt to harvest the growth of his writings and store their beans of meanings in some thesis-constructed barn appropriate the soil of his texts. . . . Readers must perforce defile the soil, must make an orderly field, and they feel especially encouraged to do so since [“Economy”] offers a text of virtually almanac wisdom that also conforms to the formulas of the conduct book and the self-improvement manual. . . . But Thoreau still hopes that a nondiscriminating reading experience is possible. (203)

Whether written as parody, as Neufeldt and Golemba assert, or as a cartographically informed entry into the genre of guidebook writing (not that these are mutually exclusive), *Walden* is a text that seeks to influence the minds of readers. Regardless of intentions, guides

lead, and Thoreau's words written about Walden Pond have had the effect of a guidebook on generations of readers in this way: by following some of the conventions of guidebooks and their cartographical tendencies, *Walden*, and this is its brilliance as well, actively creates a version of the pond in the mind of readers while seemingly being unconcerned with giving a guidebook version of the pond. According to James McGrath, by seeking "to explore one place from the broadest array of perspectives available to him at his time," Thoreau's "entire project of *Walden*" successfully "present[s] [the pond] as a place" (163, 150). The creation of place is the function of maps, and the power of Thoreau's cartography is its ability to make Walden Pond into the pond in *Walden*. In the years since his death, this is exactly what has happened. Over time, the pond in Concord has become less and less like it was, however it was, when Thoreau lived there, and more and more how it is described in the book. As Robert Sattelmeyer writes:

Despite today's pressures of urban sprawl and development, the area around the pond is significantly more heavily wooded today than it was when Thoreau was creating its image as a remote forested lake. Thanks both to reforestation and the power of *Walden*'s rhetoric, today's Walden Pond resembles the Walden Pond of the book more than the actual Walden Pond in 1845 did. (242)

For Sattelmeyer, "the Walden Pond of the book . . . is a carefully constructed literary site, less Thoreau's home than his home page, a virtual space he designed to represent himself and to promote his business, even if it was only listening to what was in the wind" (243). There may be more, however, to Thoreau's map-making at Walden Pond than the creation of a personal place.

Elsewhere, Thoreau writes, "when an acorn and a chestnut fall side by side, the one does not remain inert to make way for the other, but both obey their own laws, and spring and grow and flourish as best they can, till one, perchance, overshadows and destroys the other" (14). This



passage has traces of the observations found in Thoreau's most scientifically original and sophisticated lecture, "The Succession of Forest Trees"; however, Thoreau wrote it in "Resistance to Civil Government," and it is a telling reminder of the interconnectedness of Thoreau's natural history observations and political thought. Famously, in 1846, while living at Walden, Thoreau spent one night in jail for having failed to pay, over the course of many years, his poll tax, and "Resistance to Civil Government," given first as the talk "The Relation of the Individual to the State," was his public response to and justification of this event in hindsight. By 1848, the year he gave the talk, he was no longer living at the pond and was heavily engaged in revising his *Walden* manuscript. The point he was making in this passage is difficult to discern, even in its proper context. It comes from a paragraph where Thoreau claims the only power the state wields is physical, as it is "not armed with superior wit or honesty." He also states that even if it costs him his life, he must act by his conscience. Above all there is, like in many of Thoreau's political writings, an emphasis on his isolation from both the state and the citizen. The government "must help itself" since Thoreau is "not responsible for the successful working of the machinery of society." Ultimately, he makes the comparison of himself to a plant, which if it "cannot live according to its nature, it dies." Thoreau objects to two related injustices in this piece: slavery and the Mexican-American War. In stating his resistance to both the state and national governments, he is petitioning for action that is paradoxically both individual and universal: "if *one* Honest Man, in this state of Massachusetts, *ceasing to hold slaves* were actually to withdraw from this, and be locked up in the county jail therefor [sic], it would be the abolition of slavery in America" (10).

These political thoughts resonate as the guide in *Walden* is much like the tax resister found in "Resistance to Civil Government"—fiercely independent, playfully aloof, and, most

important for this study, a provider of a map, whether that map be found in a guidebook or conduct book or political tract. Each is also determined not to have followers. At least not have followers in any sort of conventional way political leaders and guidebook writers generally want to be followed. And certainly not in the way Wordsworth commands attention as a guide and subtly coerces readers to see the Lake District as he does. The point here is not to provide a full discussion of Thoreau's politics, but instead to suggest that Thoreau's public persona is consistently impossible to emulate, whether in his politics or in his nature writing. In her introduction to Thoreau's political essays, Nancy Rosenblum states that when it comes to his political beliefs Thoreau "reminds us that he speaks for himself, about what he knows from experience, and only about what attracts his attention" (viii). This description could as easily be applied to Thoreau the mapmaker; he too only "speaks for himself."

It is only in his response to The Fugitive Slave Act that one gets a sense of individual ethical action not being sufficient for Thoreau. Some of his most passionate writing is unleashed against his home state in "Slavery in Massachusetts," and the conclusion of that piece shows an intersection of his mapmaking and his politics. Individual action will not suffice, it seems, because the state has behaved in such a way that its very landscape is transformed. Massachusetts, as a state enforcing the Fugitive Slave Act and actively returning escaped slaves to the South by force, imposes its own will on its citizens to a degree, the essay makes clear, that it remaps the landscape. Massachusetts is transfigured into a hostile environment foreign to Thoreau, the individual who perhaps knew it best. As Thoreau inveighs against Massachusetts, all his descriptions of the evil done are posed in the terms of a landscape once familiar, now altered:

I have lived for the last month . . . with the sense of having suffered a vast and indefinite loss. I did not know at first what ailed me. At last it occurred to me that what I had lost was a country. . . . I dwelt before, perhaps, in the illusion that my life passed somewhere only *between* heaven and hell, but I now cannot persuade myself that I do not dwell *wholly within* hell. The site of that political organization called Massachusetts is to me morally covered with volcanic scoriae and cinders, such as Milton describes in the infernal regions. . . . Suppose you have a small library, with pictures to adorn the walls—a garden laid out around—and contemplate scientific and literary pursuits, etc., and discover all at once that your villa, with all its contents, is located in hell . . . do not these things suddenly lose their value in your eyes? I feel that, to some extent, the State has fatally interfered with my lawful business. It has not only interrupted me in my passage through Court street on errands of trade, but it has interrupted me and every man on his onward and upward path. . . . I walk toward one of our ponds, but what signifies the beauty of nature when men are base. . . . The remembrance of my country spoils my walk. My thoughts are murder to the State, and involuntarily go plotting against her. (*Political* 134-35)

Thoreau's righteous anger here is voiced in the idiom of landscape; the "country" he has lost is not some abstract "political organization," but the land underfoot. His walks to both pond and town are no longer what they were; his map has been re-inscribed with a place unfamiliar and unwelcome. It becomes apparent that what is at stake for Thoreau might always be the same, particularly in the light of his complaint that his surveying around Walden caused him "fear [that] this particular dry knowledge may affect my imagination and fancy." Any

infringement on his ability to map his own territory, literally as in cartography or symbolically through political action, is cause for alarm, and this infringement often triggers a vigorous response by Thoreau to unmap. His intense objections to the Fugitive Slave Law, like his objections to surveying, concern who has the ability to draw the map. When comparing the map of Maine to Walden Pond, Thoreau finds himself less “imposed” on in the woods of Maine; when it comes to matters of human bondage, Thoreau feels the imposition by map to a much greater degree and with much greater consequence.

These political questions return one to Wordsworth, who was also at times both outspoken politically and capable of figuring political questions through landscape. If Thoreau’s political writings resonate with a guidebook version of *Walden*, how do Wordsworth’s politics fit into his *Guide*? Thoreau, at the stage of his career when he was composing and revising *Walden*, described issues both political and natural in the same spirit of an intense personal response to external phenomena: he described with stunning accuracy a detail of the pond, only to refute this way of knowing; or he provided a map only to relegate it to a symbol; or he claimed slavery would be abolished based on the actions of one independent citizen.

No matter how precise his vision, Thoreau gives only partial and temporary insight to readers. On the other hand, Wordsworth in the *Guide* creates maps of local topography to mold concepts of national significance. One reason Wordsworth is so stridently seeking to keep the landscape from being tastelessly altered in the first place is that change had of late come quick to what had been a relatively static environment. In 1801, enclosure acts, which had their beginnings centuries earlier, were made systematically easier by passage of a General Enclosure Act. This allowed large landowners to cordon off their farmland, consolidate their holdings, and thus increase the already rapid pace of industrialization and factory farming, forcing labor out of

rural areas towards urban centers and encouraging women and children to join the workforce.

As a result, Wordsworth's idealized Lake District is already of the past as he writes of it, just like mythic, rural England itself.<sup>12</sup> In the *Guide*, Wordsworth lionizes a place and time when "every family spun from its own flock the wool with which it was clothed." And these families "had . . . their rural chapel, and of course their minister . . . everything else, person and possession, exhibited a perfect equality, a community of shepherds and agriculturalists" (69). There is a temporal shift here since this perfect community can no longer be found anywhere in the nation proper, a fact that Wordsworth acknowledges as early as 1802 in a letter to James Charles Fox to accompany a complimentary copy of *Lyrical Ballads*. In this letter Wordsworth praises "the class of men who are now almost confined to the north of England. They are small independent 'proprietors' of land . . . men of respectable education, who daily labour on their own little properties," "a class of men," Wordsworth notes, that "is rapidly disappearing" (*Letters* 261). Two years earlier, Wordsworth had personified this disappearing class in "Michael," whose title character will ultimately lose his land as a changing Lake District economy forces his only son into urban labor. Wordsworth's many exhortations on land-use want to freeze a moment in time so that what was once in England can be preserved in this "community of shepherds and agriculturalists."

As for the religious significance of the Lake District, Wordsworth makes a related synecdochic move in his depiction of rural chapels, finding in one the religious institutions of the entire country. In the following passage from his *Guide*, Wordsworth moves from the local church to the Anglican nation as a whole only to return to the very rocks he knows so well.

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<sup>12</sup> How far back, exactly, does one have to travel to find the actual English, agrarian ideal? "In a Celtic world, before the Saxons came up the rivers? In an Iberian world, before the Celts came? . . . Where indeed shall we go, before the escalator stops?" asks Raymond Williams, whose economic and cultural analysis of each idealized time also investigates Wordsworth's portrayal of the vanishing, rural itinerant worker and the small farm holder (11).

Along the way he reifies the seclusion and independence of the Lake District—a map he has been at pains to produce:

A man must be very insensible who would not be touched with pleasure at the sight of the chapel of Buttermere, so strikingly expressing, by its diminutive size, how small must be the congregation there assembled, as it were, like one family; and proclaiming at the same time to the passenger, in connexion [sic] with the surrounding mountains, the depth of that seclusion in which the people live, that has rendered necessary the building of a separate place of worship for so few. A patriot, calling to mind the images of the stately fabrics of Canterbury, York, or Westminster, will find a heartfelt satisfaction in the presence of this lowly pile, as a monument of the wise institutions of our country, and as evidence of the all-pervading and paternal care of that venerable Establishment, of which it is, perhaps, the humblest daughter. The edifice is scarcely larger than many of the single stones or fragments of rock which are scattered near it. (73)

From “single stone” to Westminster Abbey, from “lowly pile” to the “Establishment” that is the Anglican Church, it is clear what is at stake for Wordsworth in his mapping project of the *Guide*. He uses his considerable geological fluency and cartographical skill to bound an area figuratively and instill in it values that are presented as products of the land itself, obfuscating human production with natural phenomena. In this way, his rhetorical strategies, though not his results, are exactly the same as Thoreau’s. Wordsworth employs the grand vision of cartographer to isolate and valorize the Lake District as Old England.

Not so much a conservationist as a conservative, Wordsworth is linked to the Tory party in his later career, often in unflattering terms, a label applied to him even by contemporaries such

as Shelley and Byron. This conservatism is evident in his mapping project in the *Guide* as well as in his more explicit political statements. Christoph Bode links the *Guide* directly to his Tory politics: as Wordsworth comes to see “political unrest and social disruption as the result of an irrational and presumptuous violation of ‘natural’ laws and ties . . . his Tory solution for the social questions created by Manchester capitalism was an appeal to everybody to return to their places and do their duty.” Wordsworth makes equivalent “an aesthetically motivated appeal to *natural laws of taste* with a political appeal to acceptance of a *natural hierarchy*” (Bode 104-5). To figure the nation as nature is impossible, though, without a reliable map, and the *Guide* provides this function.

Unlike Wordsworth’s, Thoreau’s guidebook does not show readers how to get where they are going or where to look when they arrive, nor does it espouse one particular political system. The cartographic strategies found in Wordsworth, particularly in the *Guide*, are present in Thoreau as well; however, nowhere is Wordsworth’s cordoning off land and imbuing that place with national values and religious meaning, even though, as surveyor, Thoreau may be more capable than Wordsworth of just this. Thoreau’s pond and surrounding woods escape boundaries since, as guide, Thoreau ultimately encourages readers to live guide-free and the land he guides readers to has been unmapped. His cartography, and perhaps his politics as well, are manifested so personally that any belief system is idiosyncratically inaccessible, which might, after all, be his point. However, a process of unmapping—presenting a guide without consistency in either method or message—has unintended side effects. It is the very fact that his mapping is employed in such a myriad of ways that ultimately allows for future readers, not to seeing the pond independently as their guide would have it, to attempt to fit whatever they may see into the framework of symbolism created by Thoreau. In other words, they do not see as Thoreau

wished, but as he saw. For surely Walden Pond has just as much symbolic importance to present readers as it did for Thoreau, if not more *because* of Thoreau. And one cannot argue with the results: as Sattelmeyer reminds us, Walden Pond looks much more like *Walden's* pond today, than the Walden Pond where Thoreau lived.

Today at Walden Pond, species of flowers are dying, so the Boston *Globe* reports, and scientists know this because they can compare what they find currently on Walden's shores with what Thoreau documents in the 1850s. An average rise in temperature of four degrees since Thoreau's day, these scientists argue, has caused a rather stunning disappearance of twenty-seven percent of Walden's flora. This use of Thoreau's data is extremely helpful for these scientists as the article indicates, but it seems that even they cannot escape using Thoreau as their literal tour guide as opposed to their fellow researcher. One of the study's authors is quoted in the article as noting that Thoreau is "someone people know, and he's talking about common species people know. If you came out here looking for the flowers Thoreau saw, you wouldn't find many of them. It's a sad message'" (Baker). One might agree that species dying due to manmade climate change is indeed a sad message. And it is a testament to Thoreau's scientific observations that his data remains relevant. But, it seems, this is not what makes this researcher so melancholy; instead he is saddened that one cannot now go to Walden and, using the text of *Walden* as a map, follow literally in the footsteps of Thoreau and see the exact same flowers he saw.<sup>13</sup> Though I am not sure this is either sad or unexpected, what does seem certain is that this use of Thoreau is facilitated greatly by his own creation of a guidebook in *Walden* that blurs the lines between map and myth. His purposeful inconsistencies in *Walden* do not lead to one

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<sup>13</sup> At the end of his book on the history of Walden Pond, W. Barksdale Maynard notes the multitude of ways that the pond looks different today, some of which might even make the researcher quoted in the *Globe* happy: around Walden there are more trees, but fewer pastures and fields; less diverse native flora, but more diverse fauna including deer, moose, and bear (329).



consistent picture of the landscape as does Wordsworth's text; this does not mean, however, that readers cannot come to Walden Pond and, following the text, hope to find water clear for the symbol of purity, or fill a need for a sacramental morning swim, or fish for translucent pickerel, or search for the stones marking the foundation of Thoreau's cabin and retrace his steps to the pond, or listen in agitation for a passing train. If these activities are hindered—if visitors see things their guide has not prepared them for—they leave disenchanted and disappointed. In other words, perhaps readers come away from *Walden* with Thoreau's vision of nature's infinite variety and an independent, creative spirit, but more likely they get Thoreau's vision of ponds—or this one pond—elusive as it is. And what can one expect when one sees what Thoreau saw in the manner in which he saw it? For all its vivacity and complications, Walden Pond too becomes bound by the words of its most famous guide.

Walking as Knowing in William Wordsworth's *The Excursion*  
and Henry David Thoreau's Natural History Essays

In his essay "Walking," Henry David Thoreau fondly retells a famous anecdote about William Wordsworth's love of the outdoors: "When a traveler asked Wordsworth's servant to show him her master's study, she answered, 'Here is his library, but his study is out of doors'" (*Excursions* 82). Thoreau, too, was famous among contemporaries for walking outdoors. His friend and fellow Transcendentalist Bronson Alcott called him a "peripatetic philosopher" who was "out-of-doors for the best part of his days and nights" (Alcott). The work of both Wordsworth and Thoreau is linked to their walking in nature, and this chapter investigates the out-of-doors persona cultivated by each author. Walking is, in fact, so important an activity that it necessitates that each author attempt a definition. For example, in "Walking," Thoreau both describes the practice of walking, or "sauntering," and defines the saunterer:

I have met with but one or two persons in the course of my life who understood the art of Walking, that is, of taking walks,—who had a genius, so to speak, for *sauntering*: which word is beautifully derived "from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under pretence of going *a la Sainte Terre*" to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed that "there goes a *Sainte-Terrer*," a Saunterer,—a Holy-Lander. They who never go to the Holy Land in their walks, as they pretend, are indeed mere idlers and vagabonds; but they who do go there are saunterers in the good sense, such as I mean. Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. For this is the secret of successful sauntering. . . . But I prefer

the first, which, indeed, is the most probable derivation. For every walk is a sort of crusade, preached by some Peter the Hermit in us, to go forth and reconquer this Holy Land from the hands of the Infidels. (80)

The ancient Christian is not the only past through which Thoreau filters his definition of sauntering. On a more personal level and

to come down to my own experience, my companion and I . . . take pleasure in fancying ourselves knights of a new, or rather an old, order,—not Equestrians or Chevaliers, not Ritters or riders, but Walkers, a still more ancient and honorable class, I trust. The chivalric and heroic spirit which once belonged to the Rider seems now to reside in, or perchance to have subsided into, the Walker,—not the Knight, but Walker Errant. He is a sort of fourth estate, outside of Church and State and People. (80)

Then again, this is a profession one cannot choose as “it requires a direct dispensation from Heaven to become a walker. You must be born into the family of the Walkers. *Ambulator nascitur, non fit*” (81). The saunterer, for Thoreau, is a kind of prophet, “born not made,” and set well apart from society, in fact at odds with society, existing as part of a historic, religious, and mythic tradition.

The Saunterer can be considered, in some regards, Thoreau’s ideal character, the philosopher-poet, who appears as the walker in many of Thoreau’s other essays in his collection of essays *Excursions*. Most of these essays are either a type of very localized travel writing—“A Walk to Wachusett” and “A Winter Walk”—or natural history essay—“A Natural History of

Massachusetts,” “The Succession of Forest Trees,” “Autumnal Tints,” and “Wild Apples.”<sup>1</sup> Each of these essays assumes the importance of walking, or sauntering, that Thoreau clearly explicates in “Walking.” For Thoreau, walking is not just a philosophy but a daily practice: “My vicinity affords many good walks; and though for so many years I have walked almost every day, and sometimes for several days together, I have not yet exhausted them. An absolutely new prospect is a great happiness, and I can still get this any afternoon” (83). Almost all of the other essays in *Excursions* are particular instances of doing just this—sauntering in and around Concord whether to make a record of that particular journey or to collect data for his natural histories. These essays are set in the present, and yet they operate outside of the boundaries of custom and linear time. Even if Thoreau did not create the character of the Saunterer to inhabit his essays, almost each essay in this collection celebrates the Saunterer’s perspective as he is introduced in “Walking.”

If “sauntering” is Thoreau’s word of choice for the act of walking well, one could argue that “wandering” is Wordsworth’s. In fact, a wanderer, or at least Wordsworth’s specific Wanderer in his long poem *The Excursion*, shares a number of traits with Thoreau’s Saunterer as he is defined in “Walking.” The first several hundred lines of book one of *The Excursion* give a brief biography of the Wanderer. He was born in Scotland on “a small hereditary farm” to a very strict family that taught him “[s]tern self-respect, a reverence for God’s word, / And an habitual

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<sup>1</sup> Even though Thoreau did not choose the title *Excursions*, it was one that Ralph Waldo Emerson, Bronson Alcott, and Thoreau’s sister, Sophia, all approved of. Further, their chosen title suggests outdoor travels and not a more generic grouping such as “Essays” or “Writings.” Though not collected by Thoreau himself, many of them were sent by Thoreau to James T. Fields, editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, for publication in the months preceding his death, specifically “Succession of Forest Trees,” “Walking,” “Autumnal Tints,” “Night and Moonlight,” and “Wild Apples” (Moldenhauer 343).

piety” (109, 115-16).<sup>2</sup> Though Thoreau’s Saunterer seems a bit more personable than the Wanderer, Saunterer and Wanderer both are marked by religious fervor, and the Wanderer, like the Saunterer, has been appointed for his task:

While yet a child, and long before this time,  
 Had he perceived the presence and the power  
 Of greatness; and deep feelings had impressed  
 So vividly great objects that they lay  
 Upon his mind like substances, whose presence  
 Perplexed the bodily sense. He had received  
 A precious gift. (134-40)

In education, the Wanderer has “small need of books,” relying instead on the legends of the local mountains and the tutelage of nature (163). Likewise, the Saunterer learns his “Beautiful Knowledge” or “knowledge useful in a higher sense” not from newspapers, but from his very sauntering, or put differently, his membership in the “Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance” (101).<sup>3</sup>

Most striking, however, are the links that each man finds through nature to some type of infinity or eternal truth: each experiences moments of tremendous clarity and loss of self through the observations made of the natural world while walking. Thoreau’s Saunterer refers to a specific sunset from a day in November when

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<sup>2</sup> The Wanderer here is much like Wordsworth’s other wandering and wise man from Scotland: the Leech Gatherer from “Resolution and Independence.” Like the Wanderer, the Leech Gatherer has “stately speech,” and is a “religious” man who gives “to God and men their dues” (96, 97).

<sup>3</sup> The Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance is an example of Thoreau’s excellent, and often unacknowledged, sense of humor. Through this title, Thoreau satirizes a number of nineteenth-century religious organizations, specifically the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK).

[t]he sun, just before setting, after a cold gray day, reached a clear stratum in the horizon, and the softest, brightest morning sunlight fell on the dry grass and on the stems of the trees in the opposite horizon, and on the leaves of the shrub-oaks on the hill-side, while our shadows stretched long over the meadow eastward, as if we were the only motes in its beams. It was such a light as we could not have imagined a moment before, and the air also was so warm and serene that nothing was wanting to make a paradise of that meadow. When we reflected that this was not a solitary phenomenon, never to happen again, but that it would happen forever and ever an infinite number of evenings, and cheer and reassure the latest child that walked there, it was more glorious still. (106)

The Wanderer's moment of sublimity is similar in mood as well as setting, though arriving at sunrise instead of sunset. He sees the sun

Rise up, and bathe the world in light! He looked—  
 Ocean and earth, the solid frame of earth  
 And ocean's liquid mass, in gladness lay  
 Beneath him:—Far and wide the clouds were touched,  
 And in their silent faces could he read  
 Unutterable love. Sound needed none,  
 Nor any voice of joy; his spirit drank  
 The spectacle: sensation, soul, and form,  
 All melted into him; they swallowed up  
 His animal being; in them did he live,  
 And by them did he live; they were his life.

In such access of mind, in such high hour  
 Of visitation from the living God,  
 Thought was not; in enjoyment it expired.  
 No thanks he breathed, he proffered no request;  
 Rapt into still communion that transcends  
 The imperfect offices of prayer and praise,  
 His mind was a thanksgiving to the power  
 That made him; it was blessedness and love. (200-18)

Where the Saunterer is awestruck in contemplating the “infinite number of evenings” when the sun will strike the shrub-oaks just so at the close of day and is in “paradise” itself, the Wanderer experiences “communion” with his “living God.” Their currencies are similar—the divine and infinite accessed through the natural world—and as personas they are worth considering together as figures who allow Thoreau and Wordsworth interpret nature through related strategies.

Walking, wandering, sauntering. These ways of experiencing nature are not often explored in the criticism of either author as unique activities separate from each author’s tendency to be in nature more generally.<sup>4</sup> When the Wanderer’s narrative is read alongside the Saunterer’s, it becomes immediately clear that each individual shares an affinity outside of the joys of perambulation: each is an expert, if cagey, historian of the land he traverses. The land they narrate as they walk requires of each narrator a good deal of interpretation. Neither

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<sup>4</sup> An interesting exception is the work of W. Barksdale Maynard who in his history of Walden Pond notes not just the out-of-doors persona of Thoreau, but links this persona directly with Wordsworth. “The invention of rural Concord and Walden Woods as American fields for sauntering . . . was a deliberate emulation of English habit, and when . . . Thoreau stressed how perfect Concord was for walking, [he] recalled Wordsworth’s praise for the Lake District” (33). A case could also be made that Thoreau follows in the footsteps of the British Romantic poets, Wordsworth in particular, who celebrate indolence and the junctions of work and play (Spiegelman 5). It should be noted, however, that Spiegelman himself finds the American offspring of this type of poetry to be Robert Frost and Walt Whitman.

Wanderer nor Saunterer finds the natural world around them transparently decipherable, available to be read by just any walker through the woods or on the hills. In this way, these narratives are concerned with the ability to see land itself. In the previous chapter, the cartographical knowledge employed by Wordsworth in *The Guide to the Lakes* and by Thoreau in *Walden* was shown, at times, to present the land as it was not; instead nature was displayed as Wordsworth and Thoreau wanted it to be seen. Those texts, chapter two suggested, were intended to create alternative maps of the terrain. This chapter, on the other hand, investigates the portrayal of landscape through the persona of the Wanderer in *The Excursion* and the Saunterer in Thoreau's *Excursions* to demonstrate that when nature is read through the eyes of the walker in these texts it is in order to teach readers, not *what* to see, as argued in the previous chapter, but *how* to see. Thoreau's Saunterer and Wordsworth's Wanderer occupy a transgressive position in both these narratives. They have the freedom of locomotion, which allows them to know intimately the land they traverse while not being subject to physical, economic, or social ties to it. As in chapter one, this chapter shows Thoreau and Wordsworth intensely and deliberately investigating their unique vision of the natural. And as in chapter two, this chapter displays the great divergence in purpose that these authors bring to their depictions of nature.

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Thoreau and Wordsworth present themselves as experts at discovering in their walks the history of "former inhabitants" of the land they walk, inhabitants whose artifacts are becoming more difficult to decipher as the natural world slowly effaces evidence of the human. Both



writers consciously produce texts infused with this type of human history. Wordsworth's *Excursion* itself can be defined as a narrative of the past lives of those who lived in one parish in Northern England, as well as an elegy for them. After Wordsworth's preface to the poem, he gives a brief synopsis, the common argument, of what will follow in book one. This argument states that a story of the past will be told and establishes the pattern for the entire poem: "The author reaches a ruined Cottage upon a Common, and there meets with a revered Friend, the Wanderer, of whose education and course of life he gives an account—the Wanderer, while resting under the shade of the Trees that surround the Cottage, relates the History of its last Inhabitant" (591). The first book then is made of two histories, that of the Wanderer and that of Margaret, the "last Inhabitant" referred to in the argument.

Oral history of local inhabitants is the primary narrative device in the text. This can be determined from the arguments of other chapters: book two, "The Author describes his travels with the Wanderer. . . . Wanderer's account of a Friend whom he purposes to visit" (603); book 5, "A large and populous Vale described.—The Pastor's Dwelling, and some account of him. . . . The Pastor is desired to give some portraits of the living or dead from his own observation of life among these Mountains" (641); book 7, "Pastor invited to give account of certain Graves that lie apart" (668). The story of *The Excursion*, if it can be said to have a story, is simply the relating of a series of walks and talks, a set piece established to allow the Wanderer and Pastor to argue with the Solitary and present their philosophies directly.

One might think a more concise and linear approach to these issues would be to remove the plot entirely, since it appears often gestured at only, and get to the philosophy directly. This was William Hazlitt's criticism in his review of the poem in *The Round Table*: "we could have wished that our author had given to his work the form of a didactic poem altogether, with only

occasional digressions or allusions to particular instances. But he has chosen to encumber himself with a load of narrative and description, which sometimes hinders the progress and effect of the general reasoning” (161). Hazlitt, who is generally an excellent reader of Wordsworth (an opinion not shared by the poet himself, particularly after this specific review, which damaged their relationship irreparably), is off the mark here, though one can certainly understand the desire to shrink and streamline this poem. Hazlitt even laments that Wordsworth did not simply remove all narrative from the body of the poem and place it in “plain prose notes at the end of the volume” (161). However, without the narrative—the descriptions of the walks through the vales and the histories of the inhabitants, both present and past, that the Narrator, Wanderer, Solitary, and Pastor are reminded of as they wander—Wordsworth would not have anything on which to base his “didactic poem.” That is to say, it is the wandering itself and the concomitant stories of local inhabitants and artifacts that the wandering occasions that informs the morality and message of the poem. When the Wanderer scores his philosophic points off the Solitary, he does not do so in spite of the scenery and people; the scenery and the people are his philosophy. The histories of each individual and artifact are the very essence of the poem.

In the case of Thoreau, nearly all of the essays in *Excursions* are infused with historical references, though these are not always references to a person’s past, but may also be the natural history of particular nonhuman items such as a species of plant, ice formations, or fall foliage. However, references to human history and human artifacts are not absent. For example, Thoreau relates the history of a local, natural figure in “A Winter Walk” (1843) by inviting readers with him “into this deserted woodsman’s hut.” Thoreau relates the history of the man—how he spent his days when living there—and presents this personal history as an archaeologist might, reading his story from the artifacts he has left behind: “These hemlock boughs, and the straw upon this

raised platform, were his bed, and this broken dish held his drink” (59-60). These are obvious enough observations, but Thoreau quickly goes from fact to speculation, noting,

I find some embers left, as if he had but just gone out, where he baked his pot of beans; and while at evening he smoked his pipe, whose stemless bowl lies in the ashes, chatted with his only companion, if perchance he had any, about the depth of snow on the morrow . . . or disputed whether the last sound was the screech of an owl, or the creak of a bough, or imagination only. (60)

Thoreau may be stretching what is credible in his history of the man and his home, but from this imagined debate on the origin of a peculiar sound, Thoreau becomes even more fanciful. He describes how the woodchopper stretches “himself upon the straw . . . and, seeing the bright stars of Cassiopeia’s chair shining brightly down upon him, fell contentedly asleep.” This fabrication of a rural ideal, perhaps informed by Thoreau’s own hut in the woods, is not outlandish; it is certainly one possible version of one possible night in the woodchopper’s life. However, the subsequent conclusion is remarkable and demonstrates the precise and subtle observations he brings to the relating of personal narratives.

After noting that there are other ways to comprehend the mundane details of the life of the woodchopper, “many traces from which we may learn [his] history,” he continues into more minutiae:

From this stump we may guess the sharpness of his axe, and, from the slope of the stroke, on which side he stood, and whether he cut down the tree without going round it or changing hands; and, from the flexure of the splinters, we may know which way it fell. This one chip contains inscribed on it the whole history of the wood-chopper and the world. (60)

Being able to read the world and the life of a woodcutter through crudely hewn axe-cut markings on a splinter of wood is a powerful imaginative leap for Thoreau, but it is not unusual. For example, in a related journal entry, Thoreau explains that

[e]ach stick I deal with has a history, and I read it as I am handling it and last of all, I remember my adventures in getting it, while it is burning in the winter evening. That is the most interesting part of its history. When I am splitting it, I study the effects of water on it, and, if it is a stump, the curiously winding grain by which it separates into so many prongs, how to take advantage of the grain, and split it most easily. (7: 502)

Wordsworth has much the same eye as Thoreau for these types of archaeological findings in *The Excursion*, and this is nowhere clearer than in its first book—the Wanderer’s narration of the life of Margaret, a narrative in large part informed by the Wanderer’s accounting for the history of the artifacts she has left behind. What the Narrator sees as “a roofless Hut; four naked walls / That stared upon each other” (30-31), a structure devoid of meaning, the Wanderer reads as one family’s history. At one point, the Wanderer directs the Narrator’s attention over a fence, which the Narrator dutifully climbs and sees the long untended garden belonging to the home. This too holds no meaning for the narrator; he sees simply “a plot / Of garden ground run wild” and “in a cold damp nook” a well from which to drink (453-54, 461). The Narrator sees utilitarian objects: a place to find a drink, some shade in which to rest.

The Wanderer, though, immediately corrects this impression located as it is purely in the present and personal needs of the Narrator: “I see around me here / Things which you cannot see” (469-70). By asserting the priority of his own vision, the Wanderer links his reading of

artifacts, not to the present needs of either himself or the Narrator, but to a vision of things past. “[W]e die,” he continues,

“nor we alone, but that which each man loved  
 And prized in his peculiar nook of earth  
 Dies with him, or is changed; and very soon  
 Even of the good is no memorial left.” (470-74)

However, this lament inspired by Margaret does not hold true in the case of Margaret herself.

After all, the Wanderer is teaching the Narrator how to read a “memorial” in her artifacts—those things she “loved” and “prized.” Though Margaret’s “nook of earth” will change, her story will remain as the Wanderer has taught a member of a new generation how to read the land on which she previously lived.

Before returning to Thoreau’s *Excursions*, it will be useful to pause briefly at *Walden*, as its chapter, “Former Inhabitants and Winter Visitors,” offers an apt comparison to book one of Wordsworth’s *Excursion*. Though neither a Wanderer nor Saunterer in *Walden*, Thoreau occupies a unique position on the pond’s banks. He is a resident, but this is a temporary position from the start. As a lifetime visitor and sometimes inhabitant, Thoreau is very interested in understanding the land surrounding the pond as it was before he built his cottage. This area, though sparsely populated in Thoreau’s day, at one time had offered a home for small communities of individuals and families who were not welcome in Concord’s town proper. These were mainly former slaves as well as Irish immigrants working on the railroad line that was being built on the north side of the pond. Thoreau calls them to mind directly, “obliged to conjure up the former occupants of these woods,” because they were the closest thing to human company that he claims to have (256). In Thoreau’s mind, it seems, there resides the memory of

previous generations of Concord citizens; he is relating folklore and old stories in this chapter in a comprehensive manner, claiming at one point that he is describing the “last inhabitant of these woods before me,” and linking their stories to his ability to read the land where they lived.<sup>5</sup> Cato Ingraham, for example, was a slave living in Walden Woods, and Thoreau’s reading of her former dwelling blends human history with natural history and privileges his discerning eye: her “half-obliterated cellar hole still remains, though known to few, being concealed from the traveler by a fringe of pines. It is now filled with the smooth sumach, (*Rhus glabra*,) and one of the earliest species of golden-rod (*Solidago stricta*)” (257). Repeatedly, and much like the Wanderer at the ruins of Margaret’s home, Thoreau figures himself as the only one who can recognize the history in Walden Woods as time has hidden most evidence of the dwellings of former inhabitants; it has all become naturalized:

Now only a dent in the earth marks the site of these dwellings, with buried cellar stones, and strawberries, raspberries, thimble-berries, hazel-bushes; and sumachs growing in the sunny sward there; some pitch-pine or gnarled oak occupies what was the chimney nook, and a sweet-scented black-birch, perhaps, waves where the door-stone was. . . . Sometimes the well dent is visible, where once a spring oozed; now dry and tearless grass; or it was covered deep. . . . These cellar dents, like deserted fox burrows, old holes, are all that is left where once the stir and bustle of human life. (263)

Notice the pairings here with the human constructions taken over by more natural processes: cellar stones replaced by berry bushes, oaks in the chimneys, birch trees for doors, and cellars like fox holes.

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<sup>5</sup> For a brief yet detailed account of these “former inhabitants,” see Maynard, 24-28.

This encroachment of nature is precisely what happens to Margaret's home, except that in her case nature was a good deal more aggressive, reclaiming it even as she lived there. The Wanderer relates that Margaret's husband Robert was forced, due to an economic slump, to join "a troop / Of soldiers, going to a distant land" in order to earn an enlistment bonus and give the money to his family. Many months later, the Wanderer visits the cottage and finds that though it has "[i]ts customary look," it now seems that the

honeysuckle, crowding round the porch,  
Hung down in heavier tufts; and that bright weed,  
The yellow stone-crop, suffered to take root  
Along the window's edge, profusely grew  
Blinding the lower panes. (676-77, 714-19)

Increasingly forlorn, Margaret is unable to continue with the duties of keeping the home. This allows nature to overtake both window and door, and in the garden "[d]aisy flowers and thrift / Had broken their trim border-lines and straggled / O'er paths they used to deck" and the "cumbrous bind-weed, with its wreaths and bells, / Had twined about her two small rows of peas, / And dragged them to the earth" (722-24, 728-30). As Margaret becomes more listless, nature disrupts human order more aggressively, gaining agency because Margaret loses hers. On a subsequent visit, the Wanderer notes of the garden: "weeds defaced / The hardened soil, and of withered grass: / No ridges there appeared of clear black mould, / No winter greenness" (834-36). After her youngest child dies,

her poor Hut  
Sank to decay . . . .  
And so she lived . . .

Through the long winter, reckless and alone;  
 Until her house by frost, and thaw, and rain  
 Was sapped; and while she slept, the nightly damps  
 Did chill her breast; and in the stormy day  
 Her tattered clothes were ruffled by the wind. (900-9)

She ultimately dies, taken over by the elements in the same manner her home is.

Thoreau never achieves this level of intimacy in his histories of human life read through artifacts, neither in his retelling of the stories of men like Hugh Quoil whom he had known personally, nor even in “Walk to Wachusett” when he passes the “scene of Mrs. Kowlandson’s [sic] capture” (*Excursions* 47). In the case of Hugh Quoil, Thoreau jokes that “[r]umor said that he had been a soldier at Waterloo. If he had lived I should have made him fight it again. . . . Napoleon went to St. Helena; Quoil came to Walden Woods” (*Walden* 262). In the case of the Mary Rowlandson, Thoreau similarly records no emotional response to passing the place of her capture as events like these seem to him “as remote as the irruption of the Goths. They were the dark age of New England” (47).

The story of Hugh Quoil, in particular, echoes aspects of Margaret’s. Like the Wanderer with Margaret, Thoreau knew Quoil before his death and visited his home before and after. He notes similar human artifacts: old clothes, a broken pipe, playing cards; and “in the rear there was the dim outline of a garden, which had been planted but had never received its first hoeing, owing to [Quoil’s] terrible shaking fits. . . . It was over-run with Roman wormwood and beggar-ticks” (262). Thoreau and the Wanderer alike seem to draw great personal solace and strength from their ability to interpret nature’s erasure of the signs of human life. Thoreau does not only



accept the demise of the previous inhabitants at Walden Pond, but he also, in his description of one particular decaying home, notes, like the Wanderer will, nature's eternal rebirth:

Still grows the vivacious lilac a generation after the door and lintel and the sill are gone, unfolding its sweet-scented flowers each spring, to be plucked by the musing traveler; planted and tended once by children's hands, in front-yard plots,—now standing by wall-sides in retired pastures, and giving place to new-rising forests;—the last of that stirp, sole survivor of that family. Little did the dusky children think that the puny slip with its two eyes only, which they stuck in the ground on the shadow of the house and daily watered, would root itself so, and outlive them and house itself in the rear that shaded it, and grown man's garden and orchard, and tell their story faintly to the lone wanderer a half century after they had grown up and died,—blossoming as fair and smelling as sweet, as in that first spring. (*Walden* 263-64)

Thoreau here is the “lone wanderer,” obtaining from plants and trees stories and relaying them, untouched by the loss of human life he reads in the decaying remnants of homes. In fact, he enjoys nature's sweet smell in the same way the Wanderer enjoys the shade in Margaret's garden or the drink from her well.

The Wanderer takes from Margaret's plot of land and decrepit cottage a similar solace, the only difference being of degree: he is moved to a moment of religious awakening inspired by his thoughts of Margaret's premature death and nature's eternal life. Of course as the Wanderer's foil in book one, the Narrator does not find this same sort of spiritual nourishment in the history of Margaret read in the ground. Abandoned by husband and a witness to the death of her children, Margaret in her short life is found by the Narrator to be tragic, even though the

Wanderer hints that her own abandonment of her responsibilities hastened her end. Initially, the Narrator can not access the Wanderer's wise passivity. At the completion of Margaret's story, the Narrator "turned aside in weakness, nor had power / To thank him for the tale which he had told." Once he has "[r]eviewed the Woman's sufferings," the Narrator "blessed her in the impotence of grief" (919-20; 924). But he does begin to come around to the Wanderer's perspective even before the Wanderer offers his final words of inspiration, noting as Thoreau does when contemplating the death of Hugh Quoil, nature's eternity:

That secret spirit of humanity  
Which, 'mid the calm oblivious tendencies  
Of nature, 'mid her plants, and weeds, and flowers  
And silent overgrowings, still survived. (925-30)

With this opening, the Wanderer immediately leads him to a moment of religious significance, and though answers as to why Margaret had to suffer are nowhere to be found, personal solace can itself be located, as is true throughout the poem, in the ability to read nature correctly: "Why then should we read / The forms of things with an unworthy eye?" (939-40), the Wanderer gently questions. Teaching the Narrator, and later the Solitary, how to make "worthy" their eyes means teaching how to find solace in the signs of human suffering left behind in the nature he teaches them how to interpret.

The Wanderer's final lesson in book one is to link Margaret's death with religious faith:

She sleeps in the calm earth, and peace is here.  
I remember that those very plumes,  
Those weeds, and the high spear-grass on that wall,  
By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,

As once I passed, into my heart conveyed  
 So still an image of tranquility,  
 So calm and still, and looked so beautiful  
 Amid the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,  
 That what we feel of sorrow and despair  
 From ruin and from change, and all the grief  
 That passing shows of Being leave behind,  
 Appeared an idle dream, that could maintain,  
 Nowhere, dominion o'er the enlightened spirit  
 Whose meditative sympathies repose  
 Upon the breast of Faith. I turned away,  
 And walked along my road in happiness. (941-56)

Once “enlightened,” once he has experienced this moment of being spiritually transformed by her naturalized memory—“an image of tranquility” which nature conveys directly into his heart—he simply walks, or wanders, away. It is a powerful conclusion to Margaret’s tale: the Wanderer experiences a Pentecostal moment as indicated when the spear-grass is “silvered over.” She becomes earth, literally part of the nature that the Wanderer alone is privileged to read, and he travels on having been nourished by the soil of which she’s a part.

Thoreau, too, makes part of his philosophy the history of the land surrounding him and his ability to narrate it. At the site of Hugh Quoil’s grave, Thoreau concludes his brief chapter on former inhabitants. Though he finds solace in tenacious and encroaching nature, he also wonders why such dwellings around Walden Pond, built much like his own cottage, all have

been overtaken by nature save for his. Why, he wonders, does Walden Pond not support the type of community that nearby Concord does? Why can't these homes remain to make a town?

Were there no natural advantages,—no water privileges, forsooth? Ay, the deep Walden Pond and cool Brister's Spring,—privilege to drink long and healthy draughts at these, all unimproved by these men but to dilute their glass. . . . Alas! How little does the memory of these human inhabitants enhance the beauty of the landscape! Again, perhaps Nature will try, with me for a first settler, and my house raised last spring to be the oldest in the hamlet. I am not aware that any man has ever built on the spot which I occupy. Deliver me from a city built on the site of a more ancient city, whose materials are ruins, whose gardens cemeteries. The soil is blanched and accursed there, and before that becomes necessary the earth itself will be destroyed. With such reminiscences I repeopled the woods and lulled myself asleep. (264)

Thoreau recoils here from his "Former Inhabitants," claiming that if one had to rely on their ruinous land all life would cease. Wordsworth and Thoreau can read, expertly so, the same type of histories in the ground: stories of nature surviving and thriving in locations of human mortality. But they side with opposite parties, and this helps emphasize the stark temporal differences in what they make of the history they read in nature. Wordsworth's struggle is to find his faith despite Margaret's tragedy, if not have his faith nourished by it. Thoreau sides with nature, disowning those whose lives he reads in the land, and claims to start new. In this way he completes what nature has begun—having the final word in the stories of their lives. The Wanderer links himself to Margaret's life even if he must ultimately overcome her story;

Thoreau ends all stories and fashions himself as the first, and only, inhabitant. Thoreau invokes the past, but denies its meaning in his ever-renewing present.

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Wordsworth and Thoreau both narrate uncontested historical narratives—land and stories to which they have sole access. This section examines what happens when the stories of the land traversed is open to alternate interpretations or outside ownership. The first journey in *The Excursion* after book one is brief—the Wanderer and Narrator travel a short distance to the home of the Solitary, a trip that immediately reinforces an understanding of the Wanderer as one who can read nature in ways others can not. The Narrator is led here by the Wanderer—as he is led for the duration of the poem by the Wanderer, Solitary, and Pastor in turn—and is so completely bereft of understanding of his environment that he does not even recognize the path they are following to be a path: it looks instead like the Wanderer’s “quest had been / Some secret of the mountain” (2: 319-20). On the other hand, the Wanderer casually navigates this completely foreign landscape: he follows no path up “a steep ascent” where all to be seen by the Narrator is “a tumultuous waste of huge hill tops,” a “savage region” (324-26). Narrator and reader both are surprised to find at the summit of this pathless and seemingly directionless ramble “[b]eneath our feet, a little lowly vale . . . even as if the spot / Had been from the eldest time by wish of theirs / So placed, to be shut out from all the world!” (328-32).

In contrast, book three finds the Wanderer and Solitary both struggling to interpret the land they traverse. The Wanderer, who has been shown to have a superb talent for finding paths in seemingly pathless hills, is baffled by the land immediately around the Solitary’s cottage as he

attempts to lead the small group by deciding between two paths. One is a small ascending path that he thinks might have been made by sheep seeking shelter, the other “a streamlet” that he believes will lead them to its source “where haply, crowned with flowerets and green herbs, / The mountain infant to the sun comes forth” (30, 33-34). His decision that they should follow the stream is wrong, and his misreading becomes apparent shortly thereafter when they find

the water, that composed this rill [becomes]

. . . disembodied, and diffused

O'er the smooth surface of an ample crag,

Loft, and steep, and naked as a tower.

All further progress here was barred. (39-43)

Though the Wanderer holds the position of moral center in *The Excursion* consistently, this at times works in concert with, and is sometimes at odds with, a separate type of knowledge Wordsworth valorizes in *The Excursion*—the expertise of local inhabitants. In this passage, it is the local knowledge of the Solitary that is more reliable. The Wanderer has followed a stream to a dead end and in doing so stumbled upon a “semicirque of turf-clad ground, / [A] hidden nook” that he has never seen before. But the Solitary, happy up to this point to be led across land he lives on, acknowledges that “I should have grieved / Hereafter, not escaping self-reproach, / If from my poor retirement ye had gone / Leaving this nook unvisited” (50-51, 116-19). What the Wanderer reads as unfamiliar territory and a dead end, the Solitary knows as a spot of local interest.

This nook, though valued by both men, inspires opposing ways of seeing, and once the travelers arrive, the Solitary and Wanderer immediately attempt alternative readings of its history and significance. It is a place strewn with rock, one large boulder with three other smaller stones

surrounding it, and two other rocks apart from this small circle hold up a third “like an altar” (60). The Wanderer notes that such a striking placement of rock cannot be the result of “lonely nature’s casual work: they bear / A semblance strange of power intelligent, / And of design not wholly worn away” (82-84), and he frames his belief in this “design” as something that literally can be read in the rocks themselves: “in these shows a chronicle survives / Of purposes akin to those of Man, / But wrought with mightier arm than now prevails” (89-91). He reads this “chronicle” as reaching from the ancient past to a point when “time and conscious nature disappear, / Lost in unsearchable eternity!” (111-12). The Wanderer is reading the stones around him as a portal to divine intention which he connects to the ancient past.

Conversely, the Solitary reads that “[t]he shapes before our eyes / And their arrangement, doubtless must be deemed / The sport of Nature, aided by blind Chance,” and though he can play with naming these rocks different things from ancient history—Pompey’s pillar, Theban obelisk, Druid cromlech—he only does so as a distraction, “beguiling harmlessly the listless hours” (124-26, 136). The real meaning for him is found in how the rocks remind him, not of divine eternity, but its opposite: “instability, revolt, decay, / And change, and emptiness” (138-39). The Solitary concludes with an acknowledgement of the relativity of knowledge, which condemns him in the Wanderer’s eyes. The different interpretations of natural signs are not simply an academic argument for the two of them—nor were they for Wordsworth himself. Instead, this argument is at the heart of ongoing geological debates about the origin of the world and the placement of human beings in a divine plan.<sup>6</sup> In this way, each man’s interpretation of these rocks indicates a

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<sup>6</sup> *The Excursion*, in particular, was important to contemporary geologists who were “professionally absorbed in a search for universal laws” because it was a work “saturated with themes of conscience and inner laws” (Wyatt, *Geologists* 147).

different worldview, as well as a different relationship to land itself. The Solitary asks his companions to

[f]orgive me, if I say,  
 That an appearance which hath raised your minds  
 To an exalted pitch (the self-same cause  
 Different effect producing) is for me  
 Fraught rather with depression than delight. (152-56)

Wordsworth has established a fascinating contrast of native knowledge and wandering knowledge; he consistently celebrates the philosophy of the Wanderer in *The Excursion*, but when what is most at issue is how to read nature correctly, the one who knows it best is in this case the Solitary, who so well knows this hidden nook that it had become an afterthought. On the other hand, the Wanderer obviously interprets its relation to divine order more accurately and in a manner more consistent with the views of Wordsworth himself. How does the Wanderer's more superficial knowledge of an area allow for a more accurate reading? For answers, one can look to two places: Thoreau, who writes often about the proper way to read the land he walks, and *The Excursion's* ultimate purveyor of local knowledge, the Pastor.

Thoreau describes these different ways of relating to land—that of a wanderer or saunterer as opposed to a dweller—as a contrast between one who walks and one who owns. Time and again throughout the body of his work, and in his pieces in *Excursions* especially, Thoreau claims, counterintuitively, to know differently—and better—than those who own the land over which he walks. The anti-ownership, anti-enclosure perspective of one who walks beyond official boundaries opens an entirely new perspective on land for Thoreau. In *Walden*, he plays with ideas of ownership, claiming that “[i]n imagination” he had “bought all the farms”



he has walked over, taking “everything but the deed,” that is everything that should be valued and not a symbolic and meaningless slip of ownership paper (81). In “Walking” he argues that the

walker in the familiar fields which stretch around my native town sometimes finds himself in another land than is described in their owners’ deeds, as it were in some far-away field on the confines of the actual Concord, where her jurisdiction ceases, and the idea which the word Concord suggests ceases to be suggested. These farms which I have myself surveyed, these bounds which I have set up, appear dimly still as through a mist; but they have no chemistry to fix them; they fade from the surface of the glass; and the picture which the painter painted stands out dimly from beneath. (103)

As was the case in *The Excursion*, there are two competing ways of seeing described in this passage. Thoreau can see as the owners see, after all he often marked their land in order for them to purchase it or to help resolve boundary disputes, but this becomes a mirage, something less real than the “actual Concord.” However, Thoreau goes further than Wordsworth: not only does the land signify different things to different individuals, but for Thoreau, it also changes so dramatically that he is affected at the level of language itself. He needs a new lexicon because the land he sees does not mean what “Concord” means to everyone else. The analogy to a painting is fitting since how to see land is what is under examination here. Thoreau’s own visual, expert understanding of nature, bounded by rules of ownership is found, when subjected to the Saunterer’s vision, to fade before his very eyes.

This way of knowing and seeing is one that he uses to his benefit, and with good humor, when addressing the Middlesex Agriculture Society in 1860 in his attempts to explain his

theories on the succession of species of trees from cleared land. He begins by acknowledging the expertise held by members of his audience as they are not just land owners but farmers as well. He notes, “Every man is entitled to come to Cattle-show, even a transcendentalist; and for my part I am more interested in the men than the cattle. I wish to see once more those old familiar faces, whose names I do not know, which for me represent the Middlesex country, and come as near being indigenous to the soil as a white man can” (*Excursions* 67). Like Wordsworth’s *Solitary*, these farmers know the land intimately as dwellers, but like Wordsworth’s *Wanderer*, Thoreau knows it better:

taking a surveyor’s and a naturalist’s liberty, I have been in the habit of going across your lots much oftener than is usual, as many of you, perhaps to your sorrow are aware. Yet many of you, to my relief, have seemed not to be aware of it, and when I came across you in some out-of-the-way nook of your farms, have inquired, with an air of surprise, if I were not lost, since you had never seen me in that part of the town or county before; when, if the truth were known, and it had not been for betraying my secret, I might with more propriety have inquired if *you* were not lost, since I had never seen *you* there before. I have several times shown the proprietor the shortest way out of his wood-lot. (67-68)

The liberty afforded to a surveyor and a naturalist is the liberty of a Saunterer. It is also trespassing, as Thoreau acknowledges by saying he has surprised farmers by being on their land. It is the nature of the Saunterer to defy boundaries.

These jokes about who has seen whom get directly to the argument of the piece. Thoreau is doing more in this talk than simply trumpeting his expert knowledge of someone else’s land, more than making a renewed argument against the political economy of farmers as he does in

*Walden*'s "Economy." He is presenting, to a knowledgeable audience, a scientific theory on a matter that has never been understood correctly: why do oak forests grow immediately when pine forests are cleared. Just as Darwin frames his argument by making use of pigeon breeders in *Origin of Species* in order to start his British reader off on familiar ground, Thoreau relies on what his audience already knows, and the knowledge he calls on from this audience is, more often than not, visual.<sup>7</sup> He directs their gaze to see what he sees because the problem itself is a visual one: at one point there were pines, they are cut, "and after a year or two you see oaks and other hard woods spring up there, with scarcely a pine amid them" (70). This is declarative; he knows they have seen what he says they see. From here, and as he begins putting together his argument, vision is conditional: they see if they look as he looks: "in this neighborhood, where oaks and pines are about equally dispersed, if you look through the thickest pine wood . . . you will commonly detect many little oaks, birches, and other hard woods" (70). Similarly: "[i]n almost every wood, you will see where the red or gray squirrels have pawed down through the snow in a hundred places" (74); and "[l]ook under a tree nut," he exhorts, "and see what proportion of sound nuts to the abortive ones" (76). How does he know what these individuals will or would see on the ground? Because he has seen it himself: "on looking carefully . . . I discovered, though it was not till my eye had got used too the search" (72); "I have since examined more carefully several dense woods" (72); "I notice on the ground" (73); "I have noticed that squirrels . . . drop their nuts in open land"; "when I examine the little oaks . . . I invariably find the empty acorn" (76). And as far as a conflicting scientific report that states that seeds lay dormant in the ground nearly indefinitely, since the author "does not tell us on what observation his remark is founded, I must doubt its truth" (77). Not being bound by the rules of

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed account of Darwin's influence on this particular Thoreau essay, see Howarth 194-97.

property allows Thoreau to know their land as an expert of a completely different sort, one with access to other types of knowledge such as natural history and cartography: the Saunterer knows how trees reproduce and how farmers can quickly find their way home.

Good observation, of course, makes for good science, and Thoreau's skilled and precise observations remain remarkable; but they make for good rhetoric as well, allowing Thoreau to make his argument hinge on the intention or effort of his audience. If one would only look, he implies, he could not help but see the truth: "in short, they who have not attended particularly to this subject are but little aware to what an extent quadrupeds and birds are employed, especially in the fall, in collecting, and so disseminating and planting the seeds of tress" (75). In "Walking," which famously begins with Thoreau wishing to "speak a word for Nature" (79), one of the few actual moments of natural history comes when Thoreau describes the flowers that he is surprised to find at the top of a white pine tree that he has climbed—they are "delicate red cone-like blossoms," blossoms completely hidden from everyone on the ground (105). It is a perfect image of the Saunterer—in a tree collecting flowers that he describes for everyone who can not see them. The Saunterer is the one who climbs the trees, wades in the bogs, takes walks in the moonlight, skates up rivers in the winter, and surveys out of the way nooks of farmland, activities all found in *Excursions*. They are also activities that defy the convention of ownership. Thoreau's privilege as Saunterer necessarily includes freedom from boundaries and an expert, scientific eye.

Wordsworth's Pastor has had life-long contacts with the members of his small, rustic parish, and he is for the Wanderer, Solitary and Narrator an expert interpreter of local history written on the stones of the churchyard and in the ground. When the Pastor is introduced in book five, he is seen as both an artifact to be read (bodily he is described as an actual part of the

ancient church with “semblance bearing of a sculptured form / That leans upon a monumental urn / in peace, from morn to night, from year to year” [215-17]) as well as a narrator in his own right, sought after by the Wanderer to tell the stories of the parishioners of his secluded church in the hills. The entreaty the Wanderer makes of him to narrate the lives of the dead stems from the expectation that the Pastor knows best the stories of the land beneath him; it is an appeal on the most basic level of local history, the history of dirt and rocks and graves. “The mine of real life / Dig for us; and present us, in the shape / of virgin ore,” the Wanderer asks of the Pastor; or perhaps tell the story of the man “who cultivates yon hanging field”; even better, as the group “stand[s] on holy earth, / And have the dead around us, take from them / Your instances [and] epitomize the life.” Ultimately the Wanderer desires the Pastor to provide them “[a]uthentic epitaphs” on those who “[b]eneath this turf lie mouldering at our feet” (630-32, 639, 646-50, 651-53). From the moment of his introduction in book five, *The Excursion* is, in great measure, the Pastor’s story, as he is repeatedly encouraged to offer, as Margaret-like spiritual balm, the stories of those to whom he has ministered.

This is a task for which the Pastor is perfectly, and solely, suited. The ancient terrain of his vale contains graves—some by age or by neglect nearly anonymous—that only the Pastor recognizes.<sup>8</sup> He, like the Wanderer and Solitary before him, is in this regard an excellent narrator, pointing to things that are indiscernible to the casual glance and is the latest character in the poem to be an expert reader of land. He is more than the Pastor of the vale, but its “Historian,” a title given to him explicitly by the Narrator at the outset of book seven (1). The Pastor is most valued for his ability to know the people of the vale, particularly the ones who are

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<sup>8</sup> The Pastor is, in this way, a repeating character in Wordsworth’s poetry. For example, in “The Brothers,” the Priest boasts to Leonard that in his churchyard they need not mark the graves since the oral tradition of his village keeps the dead always present: “We have no need of names and epitaphs; / We talk about the dead by our firesides” (178-79).

dead. Like the Wanderer then, the Pastor deals in epitaphs; he is a living monument to the lives of those who have come before, and the type of people he memorializes in his tributes are the anonymous, rustic, and independent figures that are present in much of Wordsworth's early poetry:

No evidence appears that they who rest  
 Within this ground were covetous of praise,  
 Or remembrance even, deserved or not.  
 Green is the Churchyard, beautiful and green  
 Ridge rising gently by the side of ridge,  
 A heaving surface, almost wholly free  
 From interruption of sepulchral stones,  
 And mantled o'er with aboriginal turf  
 And everlasting flowers. These Dalesmen trust  
 The lingering gleam of their departed lives  
 To oral record, and silent heart;  
 Depositories faithful and more kind  
 Than fondest epitaph. (6: 602-14)

What good, though, is a monument without any visual reminder? Can the Pastor himself replace epitaphs and monuments? Can his "oral record" be the best "depository" of past lives? It would seem so, as there are few stones even to mark graves in this vale, with ancient earth and flowers laying over generations of previous inhabitants.<sup>9</sup> Is the Pastor, and his encyclopedic

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<sup>9</sup> In Wordsworth's "The Brothers" the mountains themselves seem to mitigate to a degree the pain of death. In that poem, the thought of death was light upon one who is home and dies among the mountains. This might help to explain the peace felt by the Pastor in *The Excursion*.

memory of the vale, all that the Wanderer, Solitary, and Narrator have to rely on? The Pastor freely admits the tenuousness of this arrangement in his narrative at the grave of a fellow preacher:

A simple stone

May cover him; and by its help, perchance,  
 A century shall hear his name pronounced,  
 With images attendant of the sound;  
 Then, shall the slowly-gathering twilight close  
 In utter night; and of his course remain  
 No cognizable vestiges, no more  
 Than of this breath, which shapes itself in words  
 To speak of him, and instantly dissolves. (7: 351-60)

The Pastor's authority, established through his long years in one place, gives him unparalleled vision, and though his stories are of particular individuals, they are told more for the good they deliver to their listeners than any supposed stay they can offer to time's ultimate removal of all "cognizable vestiges" of the individuals themselves. But there are plenty of morals to be learned: a woman's grave becomes a warning about the love of knowledge over people: "Oh! pang of sorrowful regret for those / Whom, in their youth, sweet study has enthralled, / That they have lived for harsher servitude, / Whether in soul, body, or estate!" (6: 695-98). As in the case of the Wanderer's tale of Margaret to the Narrator at the beginning of *The Excursion*, the critical knowledge gained from the Pastor's story of this woman is an acquisition that brings certainty to the present. The Pastor claims as much: his stated "reverence for the dust of Man" is belied by referring to his position in relationship to these stories of

suffering as one “who unlocks / A cabinet stored with gems and pictures—draws his treasures forth” (7: 1057; 8: 2-24). The Pastor and the Saunterer both are collectors in this sense, and they gain great satisfaction from their treasures, the histories to which they have sole access, the things only they can see. Though they both attempt to teach others what to see and how to interpret it, each artifact is so indelibly linked to each of them personally that this knowledge can not be disseminated in any way that separates the man from his message. Their ways of seeing are impossible to reproduce as their knowledge of landscape is so localized as to place their historical knowledge in an isolated personal register.

Go up any hill, Thoreau instructs his readers in “Autumnal Tints” and all the glories of a New England fall “you *will* see, and much more, if you are prepared to see it,—if you look for it” (128). The construction of his sentence allows Thoreau to claim two contradictory things: in order to see the same nature he has been describing in his essay, one must only “look,” implying agency and effort are all that is required, a similar entreaty to the one he makes in “The Succession of Forest Trees.” But this, in fact, is not sufficient at all—he also says that one must be “prepared.” How empowering, perhaps, for readers to go up their own mountains then, only having to look well in order to see all of the colors of fall. And how daunting, how it must discourage, to learn that the “preparation” is something that Thoreau posits as depending on complete subjectivity of prior knowledge:

The Scarlet Oak must, in a sense, be in your eye when you go forth. We cannot see anything until we are possessed with the idea of it, take it into our heads,—and then we can hardly see anything else. In my botanical rambles, I find, that, first, the idea, or image, of a plant occupies my thoughts, though it may seem very foreign to this locality. . . and for some weeks or months I go thinking of it, and



expecting it, unconsciously, and at length I surely see it. This is the history of my finding a score or more of rare plants, which I could name. A man sees only what concerns him. A botanist absorbed in the study of grasses does not distinguish the grandest Pasture Oaks. . . . I have found that it required a different intention of the eye, in the same locality, to see different plants, even when they were closely allied. (129)

How personal this natural knowledge is, and how difficult to reproduce is this way of seeing. From this passage, one sees how easy it is to miss a giant oak tree by looking only for grass, since in order to see Oak trees one must be already looking for them. In *Wild Fruits*, one gets an idea of just what Thoreau means by “anticipating,” since it is here that Thoreau details exactly where and what he has seen. To the best of any critic’s knowledge, *Wild Fruits* was intended as a part of Thoreau’s “Kalendar” project for the natural history of Concord, Massachusetts, a project that certainly would help any saunterer hoping to see a scarlet oak to “anticipate” it, for it would include locations and dates and descriptions. Thoreau intended his Kalendar to be a typical year in the natural history of Concord with information pulled primarily from his notes and the specimens he had collected over decades of sauntering. In *Wild Fruits*, one can go to the entry for the acorns of the white oak tree to see how he has learned to “anticipate” them. It is a common species to Concord and one would think it hard to miss. Nevertheless, this is the treatment it receives in this book:

September 12, 1854. White-oak acorns have many of them fallen. They are small and very neat light-green acorns, with small cups, commonly arranged two by two close together, often with a leaf growing out between them, but frequently forming a little star with three rays, looking very artificial.

.....  
 September 22, 1854. Some white-oak acorns are turned a salmon color or blushing, like the leaves.

September 30, 1854. Acorns are generally now turned brown and the ground is strewn with them, and in paths they are crushed by our feet and wheels. The white-oak are dark and the most glossy.

October 2, 1859. Acorns generally, as I notice . . . are turned brown . . . but few are still green. Yet few, except of shrub oak, have fallen. I hear them fall, however, as I stand under the trees.

October 8, 1851. Under the woodside by J. P. Brown's grain field I picked up some white-oak acorns in the path, which I found to be unexpectedly sweet and palatable, the bitterness being scarcely perceptible. To my taste, they are almost as good as chestnuts. . . .

October 11, 1859. Looking under large oaks (black and white) the acorns appear to have fallen or been gathered by squirrels and so on. I see clusters on twigs cut off, the nuts abstracted.

October 17, 1857. Glossy-brown white-oak acorns strew the ground thickly, many of them sprouted. How soon they have sprouted! I find some quite edible. (*Wild Fruits*, 182-83)

In addition to the type of vision he displays elsewhere in essays like "Succession of Forest Trees," here he also listens to and tastes his subjects as well. In the section of *Wild Fruits* from which the above selection comes, Thoreau has similar lists of the dates of noteworthy events in

the life cycle of the acorns, not just of white oaks, but also of shrub oaks, red oaks, black oaks, as well as acorns more “generally” (183).

This conflation of years of research into a typical year sheds some interesting light on this discussion of how to see like a Saunterer. Sauntering becomes synchronistic. In the passages on white-oak acorns, eight years are reordered to make a natural, calendar year: all years have become one year, always typical and always present. Therefore, each time he tells a reader in the present to look or tells a reader what he or she could see if they only looked better, the vision he is presenting is a natural history informed by a lifetime of sauntering, collecting, dating, and analyzing.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the act of combining many years of observations into one “typical” year encourages Thoreau to keep the history of his discoveries in the background while highlighting the idea of an ever-repeating year-long cycle. In this way, his intended Kalendar is similar to the memories of the Pastor, and the Pastor is himself, in this framing, a Kalendar project of the people of the Lake District. Like the Saunterer who sees the same ground differently based on intention and anticipation, the Pastor too can find history subject to various “intentions.”

The Pastor describes at various points in *The Excursion* how one piece of ground can signify alternate interpretations depending on the individual. In his first speech to his guests, and immediately after learning that they are engaged in metaphysical questions and are looking for his help in solving them, he claims that there are only two ways to interpret human life: it is either “fair and tempting, a soft scene / Grateful to sight, refreshing to the soul, / Or a forbidding tract of cheerless view” (5, 527-29). Elaborating on how this perspective is similar to the way one can read the ground where they are standing, he argues:

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<sup>10</sup> According to Bradley Dean, his calendar was influenced in particular by John Evelyn’s *Kalenarium Hortense, or Gardener’s Almanack* (1699), and the conventions of almanacs make another possible reason to frame events into one year (ix).

Thus, when in changeful April fields are white  
 With new-fallen snow, if from the sullen north  
 Your walk conduct you hither, ere the sun  
 Hath gained his noontide height, this churchyard, filled  
 With mounds transversely lying side by side  
 From east to west, before you will appear  
 An unilluminated, blank, and dreary, plain,  
 With more than wintry cheerlessness and gloom  
 Saddening the heart. (5: 531-39)

On the other hand, if one were to “[g]o forward, and look back” then “will a vernal prospect greet your eye, / All fresh and beautiful, and green and bright, / Hopeful and cheerful” (5: 539,544-47). For the Pastor this represents the two ways to think about death; for the Wanderer it demonstrates the power of the eye: ““We see,”” he says, ““as we feel”” (5: 558). Though how to see the histories of the ground has been at issue through much of the poem, the Wanderer here reframes their quest in terms of feeling—what is at issue for him, it turns out, is not how to see, but how to feel. For the Wanderer the essential question becomes how do we teach ourselves “how to acquire / The inward principle that gives effect / To outward argument” and “without it blind” (5: 571-73,579). “[B]lind” without an “inward principle,” we can only see correctly, or at all, when we feel correctly. The purpose of these many stories from both the Pastor and Wanderer is to teach right thought. It is right thought, then, that can facilitate right vision.

Though right feeling is the goal, and Wordsworth certainly promotes only one type of seeing (the Wanderer’s) and discourages others (the Solitary’s, and at times even the Pastor’s,

shifting perspectives), he might as well endorse a completely relativistic vision, such as the Pastor seems here to support, as no one can be expected to read history in land as well as the Wanderer or Pastor. Both are orators of the dead, so to speak, preaching a message of life from the grave. In particular, the Pastor's rhetoric is of the discourse of epitaphs and, as this is a subject of some significance to Wordsworth, it will clarify things to consider briefly his 1810 "Essay on Epitaphs," which tellingly, he appended to the first publication of *the Excursion*. Surprisingly, the Pastor's description of both the function of epitaphs and the moral character of those interred around him accords imperfectly with Wordsworth's own definition of the ideal epitaph in his essay—embracing and contradicting it on various points. The Pastor has been shown to acknowledge the temporary nature of the stones themselves which ultimately will not show any "cognizable vestige" where they now mark simple graves; Wordsworth in his essay, conversely, strongly links epitaphs to permanent markers (*Complete Works* 730). Many of the grave sites the Pastor narrates have no epitaph whatever, leaving the Pastor's own narration to serve in their place, contradicting the type of memorial to common, rural men and women Wordsworth envisions in his essay, not ornamental or gaudy but simple words chiseled on a small marker in "close connection with the bodily remains of the deceased" (*Complete Works* 730). Wordsworth's ideal epitaphs are more permanent than those of *The Excursion*.

However, the details Wordsworth favors including in epitaphs resonate with the stories the Pastor tells: Wordsworth emphasizes that it is the function of an epitaph to describe the character of the individual, specifically his or her "age, occupation, manner of life, prosperity" (*Complete Works* 731). These markers of "character" for Wordsworth are exactly the qualities of local inhabitants the Wanderer has convinced the Pastor to recount, and the Pastor himself is a repository for all the epitaphs of those in his ministry, even those whom would otherwise have

been forgotten as their stone markers vanish. Thinking of the Pastor in this manner offers a way around these conflicting messages of epitaphs that endure and others which slowly erode and vanish. Though the Wanderer, Narrator, and Solitary in the poem need to seek the Pastor's localized expertise to teach them how to feel and see correctly, readers of *The Excursion* do not, as the Pastor's "chiseled" words have found a different medium for eternity. Wordsworth's text ultimately functions as the type of epitaph he imagines in his essay. But instead of documenting the life of one specific individual, it evokes the "character" of an entire era of England that existed for generations in the Lake District. As the Pastor has noticed, oral traditions can vanish as quickly as breath itself, and Wordsworth's poem memorializes this against further loss. Wordsworth's text serves a completely different function than Thoreau's: it establishes boundaries of communal life and presents the village as a sort of enclosure existing outside of time and progress.

Thoreau's Saunterer, though exhibiting a strikingly similar vision, creates a type of knowledge in opposition to any socially or politically created boundary. However much he may claim that "intention" is all one needs to see nature, what he means is see nature like he does, a task impossible for not only is his knowledge exceptional—every object seen in the present glance holds silently every previous encounter—it is inviolately personal, so much so that, at times, he creates what he sees as he describes it or denies emphatically what everyone else may see: "The landscape-painter uses the figures of men to mark a road. He would not make that use of my figure. I walk out into a Nature such as the old prophets and poets, Menu [sic], Moses, Homer, Chaucer, walked in. You may name it America, but it is not America" ("Walking" 85). The landscape here is a painting with the Saunterer making his pilgrimage to an entirely new

country. The land is fluid, not fixed, and Thoreau has the ability to read so much history into one particular item that that his vision ultimately becomes transformative of nature itself.

An exemplary example of Thoreau's transformative vision is in the late Natural History essay "Wild Apples":

There is, first of all, the Wood-Apple (*Malus sylvatica*); the Blue-Jay Apple; the Apple which grows in Dells in the Woods, (*sylvestrivallis*,) also in Hollows in Pastures (*campestrivallis*); the Apple that grows in an old Cellar-hole (*Malus cellaris*); the Meadow-Apple; the Partridge-Apple; the Truant's Apple, (*Cessatoris*,) which no boy will ever go by without knocking some off, however late it may be; the Saunterer's Apple,—you must lose yourself before you can find the way to that; the Beauty of the Air (*Decus Aeris*); December-Eating; the Frozen-thawed (*gelato-soluta*), good only in that state; the Concord Apple, possibly the same with the *Musketaquidensis*; the Assabet Apple; the Brindled Apple; Wine of New England; the Chickaree Apple; the Green Apple (*Malus viridis*); *this has many synonyms; in an imperfect state, it is the Cholera morbifera aut dysenterifira, puerulis dilectissima;—the Apple which Atalanta stopped to pick up; the Hedge-Apple (Malus Sepium); the Slug-Apple (limacea); the Railroad-Apple, which perhaps came from a core thrown out of the cars; the Apple whose Fruit we tasted in our Youth; our Particular Apple, not to be found in any catalogue,—Pedestrium Solatium; also the Apple where hangs the Forgotten Scythe; Iduna's Apples, and the Apples which Koki found in the Wood; and a great many more I have on my list, too numerous to mention,—all of them good. As Bodaeus exclaims, referring to the cultivated kinds, and adapting Virgil*

*to his case, so I adapting Bodaeus,—* “Not if I had a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths, / An iron voice, could I describe all the forms / And reckon up all the names of these *wild apples*. (148)

Riffing on all taxonomic projects, Thoreau creates here a scientific classification for a species of tree that must have seemed to most not much better than a weed. (Even though the apple tree must be grafted to reproduce, it was a common tree throughout all New England.) The types of knowledge called on to name these apples are extraordinary: the Latin and American Indian naming, the references to Virgil and seventeenth-century Dutch botanist Johannes Bodaeus Stapelius, the reliance on Greek myth and Concordian folklore, not to mention the memories from Thoreau’s own childhood. The sheer variety of tactics taken, the many different ways or registers of knowing offered here, leads one to the conclusion that in order to see the crab apple truly, one must know the annals of natural history as well as have a lifetime of experience sauntering around Concord among the apples themselves. This vision is personal, historical, and scientific, and it is the Saunterer’s vision at its most realized. Unlike the Wanderer’s vision, it does not idealize a past through the creation of a value-laden, bounded community.

Thoreau seems as eager to separate himself from the past as he is fluent in reading the history in the ground. This becomes most clear when Thoreau, like Wordsworth, links his vision of nature to his vision of nation:

Going up the side of a cliff about the first of November, I saw a vigorous young apple-tree, which, planted by birds or cows, had shot up amid the rocks and open woods there. . . . It was a rank wild growth, with many green leaves on it still, and made an impression of thorniness. . . . The owner knows nothing of it. The day was not observed when it first blossomed, nor when it first bore fruit, unless by



the chickadee. There was no dancing on the green beneath it in its honor, and now there is no hand to pluck its fruit,—which is only gnawed by squirrels, as I perceive. . . .When I go by this shrub thus late and hardy, and see its dangling fruit, I respect the tree, and I am grateful for Nature’s bounty, even though I cannot eat it. Here on this rugged and woody hill-side has grown an apple-tree, not planted by man, no relic of a former orchard, but a natural growth, like the pines and oaks. . . . [T]he apple emulates man’s independence and enterprise. It is not simply carried, as I have said, but, like him, to some extent, it has migrated to this New World, and is even here and there, making its way amid the aboriginal trees. . . . [O]ur wild apple is wild only like myself, perchance, who belong not to the aboriginal race here, but have strayed into the woods from the cultivated stock. (“Wild Apples” 137-38)

There are Thoreau’s usual maneuvers here: he posits his personal experience as greater than the landowner who “knows nothing of it”; he displays a natural historian’s knowledge of the origin of new trees; he moralizes about the health of wilderness in comparison to “cultivated” cities and uses plant as metaphor. Though he claims it to be nearly ahistorical, he reads its history expertly: he knows it is young, how it was likely planted, what type of animals feed on it, the very origin of its species. All this is brought forth and denied in favor of a “New World” like the United States but different—perpetually new. Thoreau’s sauntering vision is a completely anti-structural system, effacing all boundaries into a personal and continuous present.

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How do the Wanderer and the Saunterer teach readers to see the land through which they walk? It seems that taken together these visions present a near-paradox, in which the Saunterer's vision is informed by a lifelong study, therefore impossible for all but him, while to see like the Wanderer requires a metafiction that attempts to bind locally and make permanent an already past feeling for rural ideals. This too is impossible, as the Lake District presented by the Wanderer does not exist; it is only through the act of wandering—creating boundaries and retelling histories—that it is created. Both a Saunterer and a Wanderer see land in ways that are exceptional and personal, unable to be taught, though presented in a didactic register. Wordsworth, however, needs the Wanderer to see the natural *just so*, whereas Thoreau at least implicitly allows other saunterers to produce other personal and exceptional interpretations of nature.

Wordsworth presents his reasons for this just-so vision at the beginning of book five when the Solitary, Wanderer and Narrator leave the Solitary's vale, the meaning of which has been contested for much of book four. Surprisingly, this clear-eyed vision comes from the Narrator, mostly a neutral observer in the poem. However, in this case it seems he has taken Wordsworth's and the Wanderer's argument to heart and restates it at the midpoint of the poem, with great beauty and clarity:

How vain, thought I, is it by change of place  
 To seek that comfort which the mind denies;  
 Yet trial and temptation oft are shunned  
 Wisely; and by such tenure do we hold  
 Frail life's possessions, that even they whose fate  
 Yields no peculiar reason of complaint

Might, by the promise that is here, be won  
To steal from active duties, and embrace  
Obscurity, and undisturbed repose.  
—Knowledge, methinks, in these disordered times,  
Should be allowed a privilege to have  
Her anchorites, like piety of old;  
Men, who, from faction sacred, and unstained  
By war, might, if so minded, turn aside  
Uncensored, and subsist, a scattered few  
Living to God and nature, and content  
With that communion. Consecrated be  
The spots where such abide! But happier still  
The Man, whom, furthermore, a hope attends  
That meditation and research may guide  
His privacy to principles and powers  
Discovered or invented; or set forth,  
Through his acquaintance with the ways of truth,  
In lucid order; so that, when his course  
Is run, some faithful eulogist may say,  
He sought not praise, and praise did overlook  
His unobtrusive merit; but his life,  
Sweet to himself, was exercised in good  
That shall survive his name and memory. (5: 20-48)

Here, better than in any of his many prefaces to his own work, is a description of Wordsworth's attraction to the rural individual who is encountered often in his work—from the Wanderer, to Michael, to the Leech Gatherer, even to himself at times in *The Prelude*. It is a rural ideal that Wordsworth spends much of his career mourning the passing of, especially in *The Excursion* where it is significant that most of the best stories are of the dead. But Wordsworth portrays the futility of this type of life elsewhere; for example Michael and the Leech Gatherer are tragic figures, exemplars of a style of life that was impossibly outdated by the time Wordsworth writes about them. Raymond Williams, in *The Country and the City*, recalls that Wordsworth has these individuals “receding, moving away into a past which only a few surviving signs, and the spirit of poetry, could recall” (130). But what this passage does well is to give new life to this old myth of the country in the present, creating a “consecrated” place for it. The anonymous life, well-lived in the hills of Northern England, is a fiction, one dreamt of in vain according to the Narrator, yet even he cannot help but to work to establish it in this one specific place. It is here where the two ways of seeing nature—that of the local Pastor or of the Wanderer—come to reinforce one another. A Pastor who serves only his parsonage in the hills cannot reach immortality, as his “name and memory” like the names of those he attends do not survive; his only link to the eternal is through the “good” that it does, and it is the Wanderer who is there to narrate and chronicle this good. Readers need the Wanderer, not simply for his right views, but because he makes incarnate what would otherwise be the anonymity of those Wordsworth hopes readers do not forget.

Ultimately, the Wanderer's mobility is his most essential trait. He alone can travel to the Pastor's village, and he alone can leave unaffected. In this narrative, there is a “repeopling” of the hills, and the Wanderer is in this way a sort of living epitaph, a vessel for the stories of past

lives of rural England. On the other hand, Thoreau's Saunterer creatively interacts with the landscape, learning more and seeing better than any of those who own the land he traverses. In *Walden*, Thoreau claims that he too "repeoples" the woods around the pond with its "former inhabitants." In the essays in *Excursions*, he leaves behind this commitment to fellow travelers in order to maintain his exclusive, and Solitary, relationship to the natural world.

Lilliputians on Cape Cod and Ugly Fish Women in Calais:  
The Travel Narratives of Wordsworth's Stay-at-Home Tourist  
and Thoreau's Anti-Pilgrim

The rhetoric of the picturesque, cartography, and the pedestrian ramble all made use of visual components that are essential to the ways in which these rhetorics persuade. William Wordsworth and Henry David Thoreau are fluent in each of these discourses of nature, as the three previous chapters have shown. They read their physical surroundings masterfully, directing readers to see and value nature as they do, while mostly obscuring the compositional struggles and strategies they use to make the natural world appear just so. This chapter looks to writings where both authors are less comfortable in their surroundings. To do so, I focus on two heterogeneous sets of writings: I read Wordsworth's sonnet sequence *The River Duddon* against Thoreau's *The Maine Woods*, and then Wordsworth's *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent* against Thoreau's *Cape Cod*.

The first pairing follows the writers as they traverse ground that is, or may become, familiar. The Duddon valley and the woods of Maine are different terrains evoking very different associations. The Duddon is a relatively small river in England's Lake District, surrounded mostly by farmland that has been cultivated for many hundreds of years. It is land that Wordsworth knew well. In creating a travel narrative of this landscape, Wordsworth had the freedom to let the narrative wander from the present river to an investigation of England's rural history. In this way, Wordsworth's familiarity with the river allowed him to trace it temporally and imaginatively backwards even as he continued to walk along its banks. At the time of each of Thoreau's three visits to Maine, on the other hand, the state was populated only by some remnants of Native American tribes, primarily the Penobscot, and loggers who supplied the

wood necessary for industry all the way down the Eastern seaboard of the United States.

Though this landscape was initially unfamiliar to Thoreau, during each subsequent visit he became more familiar with the features, both natural and manmade, of the terrain. What these two locations—the Duddon river valley and the Maine wilderness—have in common is their eventual legibility for both authors; they are locations, generally, that Wordsworth and Thoreau understand and can describe.

The second pairing features the landscape of the European continent in 1820 and that of Cape Cod in the mid-nineteenth century, two very different types of land. However, different as they are, these foreign locations prove frightfully difficult for their respective authors to come to terms with in their depictions of them. Wordsworth confronts a landscape on the continent of Europe marred by war and with historical resonances which are far different than those he finds in England's Northern hills. Thoreau travels to a peninsula that literally shifts beneath his attempted surveys and which supports an ecosystem that he has never before encountered, one that subverts his abilities as a natural historian.

One of the standard features of travel writing is the foregrounding of an author's experience of the unknown—travel writing necessitates “translating the foreign into discourse” to create “on the topography of foreignness a demand for some form of dramatic departure from the familiar and the mundane” (Chard 2). All travel involves the moving to someplace else, an act which necessitates trying to describe the differences encountered as a result of landscape, population, and culture. However, this chapter argues that irrespective of the conventions of the genre, the experience of the land itself drives many of the rhetorical decisions of each author, particularly when that landscape is unfamiliar. Wordsworth and Thoreau, then, are two travelers especially attuned to the ground underfoot—to the varieties of natural scenes—who are experts

in the various strategies needed to describe the landscapes they encounter. In their travel writing specifically, it is the varied and unexpected topography that encourages the type of rhetorical strategy they put forth to come to terms with the land's foreignness. Chloe Chard argues that "travel writings . . . are, throughout their history, closely concerned with the traveler-narrator's own rhetorical strategies" and that "the task of finding the forms of language to translate the topography into discourse is a recurrent object of discussion" in all travel literature (9). Both Wordsworth and Thoreau undertake this act of "translation" of "topography into discourse" (while simultaneously "translating," or moving, themselves from place to place), but this chapter focuses on those moments when their translation falters, when their literacy, to follow Chard's reasoning, is challenged. These moments of untranslatability examined in the second half of the chapter are rich locations for analysis.

The land has always mattered to Wordsworth and Thoreau, but nowhere does it matter more than on their travels. This chapter examines moments of natural literacy as well as those of impossible translations. It looks for the rhetorical strategies that these writers deploy when they cannot understand the land surrounding them by using the familiar frameworks of English history, cartography, or natural history. No matter the terrain, in their travels both writers manage to read into foreign locations similar ideals of a national space that often also includes green, domestic landscapes that they have provided the scaffolding for in other discourses of seeing nature, such as aesthetic theory, map-making, and wandering.

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Thoreau's *The Maine Woods* is made up of three shorter travel essays, "Ktaadn" (1846), "Chesuncook" (1853), and "The Allegash and East Branch" (1857), each essay being the account of a separate trip Thoreau took to Maine. Taken together, these narratives demonstrate Thoreau becoming more familiar with a landscape initially vexing to him. Wordsworth's *The River Duddon: A Series of Sonnets* (1820) is a very liberally defined travel narrative; he compresses the journey from the river's source to its mouth into the travels of one day in order to achieve the poem's "prominent structure of unity" that will match the other temporal structure in the poem, "the image of human development" (Wyatt, *Poems of Travel* 32). Even with this ulterior theme, the individual sonnets are indeed examples of travel writing, especially when considering that they were published with the early version of the *Guide to the Lakes*: "the core of the volume is about journeying, first through a loco-descriptive series of sonnets about a little-known valley in the Lake District, then a supporting periphery of two major prose accounts, one a substantial Guide to the Lake District and the other a memoir of a Lakeland personage" (Wyatt, *Poems of Travel* 30). Wordsworth sets out to provide a travel narrative structured by the course of a river that he knows well, while Thoreau goes off without any loco-descriptive preconceptions to the unknown forests of Maine. Yet each writer begins his journey knowing what he expects to find: Wordsworth's river will be as it always has been, and Thoreau's Maine will prove to be the site of a wilderness adventure.

"Hail ancient manners!" Wordsworth proclaims with religious intensity in the introductory poem, which is addressed to his brother in London (55). Set in the present tense before his journey begins, this poem displays another version of the rural, historic ideal that other chapters have shown Wordsworth working to create in *The Excursion* and *The Guide to the Lakes*. He tells his brother of the "Minstrels" who are wandering from cottage to cottage singing

“their Christmas tune,” whom he hears on the night that he writes the poem (1). There were the carolers beneath “cottage-eaves,” covered by the light of “a lofty moon” that made the green of the “encircling laurels” reflect “a rich and dazzling sheen,” even deeper than their “natural green” (2-6). Wordsworth describes this scene to his brother Christopher, newly appointed Master at Trinity College at Cambridge, to remind him of similar joyous scenes they shared in childhood:

would that Thou, with me and mine,  
 Hadst heard this never-failing rite;  
 And seen on other faces shine  
 A true revival of the light  
 Which Nature and these rustic Powers,  
 In simple childhood, spread through ours. (25-30)

The poem is a piece of nostalgia, offered to his brother whose profession has taken him away from the rural lakes and who can no longer experience the simplicity and natural goodness that the poet can.

This annual rite of caroling is only one example of the “ancient Manners” Wordsworth hails in the poem. These rural customs do more than simply mark the wholesome past; they protect the present: they are “sure defense, / Where they survive, of wholesome laws; / Remnants of love whose modest sense / Thus into narrow room withdraws” (55-58). The Lake District is one such “narrow room,” protected from incursion of change and modernity, and Wordsworth, in this poem, believes it needs more protection still than that offered solely by its ancient customs. As was discussed in chapter two, this is not uncommon for Wordsworth. He was already commenting on impending change no later than 1810, with the first version of his *Guide*. It is no

surprise, then, that Wordsworth finds nature the answer to this call for further “defense”:  
 “Hail, Usages of pristine mould, / And ye that guard them, Mountain’s old!” (59-60). Framed by familial nostalgia, this poem actually becomes more a call to arms than the celebration of an idyllic rural retreat. The mountains are a defensive barrier against attack from the “imperial City” whose “din” like a war drum “[b]eats frequent” on his brother’s “satiated ear” (73-74). Even the Thames, portrayed as “proud,” seems a threat to the poet’s “humbler streams, and greener bowers” (66).<sup>1</sup> This rural ideal conforms to the program establishing national value in the Lake District that has been examined previously: it is embodied by local inhabitants (carolers in this case, priests and wanderers previously), evocative of a passing way of life, and protected by nature itself.

With this poem for an introduction, Wordsworth begins his series of sonnets by immediately echoing this call for nature to protect the past. In his first sonnet, he rejects more famous rivers and their settings. Neither the “Latian shades” surrounding Horace’s “Bandusia,” nor the “moist marge of Persian fountains,” nor even “Alpine torrents thundering” can compare to his “native Stream” (1: 1,6,7,9). Instead of “ancient manners,” in this first sonnet, the poet calls out,

All hail, ye mountains! hail, thou morning light!  
 Better to breathe at large on this clear height  
 Than toil in needless sleep from dream to dream:  
 Pure flow the verse, pure, vigorous, free, and bright,  
 For Duddon, long-loved Duddon, is my theme! (10-14)

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<sup>1</sup> In book seven of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth similarly figures the city of London as an assault upon his senses in direct contrast to the peace he finds the Lake District. The imagery of this city/country dichotomy is taken from *Paradise Lost*, where Milton contrasts hell as chaos in book one with Eden as paradise in book four.

By eschewing the fabled rivers of ancient literature or continental sublimity, Wordsworth begins the series of sonnets with his eye very much focused on the present water of the Duddon River. The air is as “clear” as his verse will be “bright.” But the journey along this stream is not as “clear” or “bright” as all this. It is, at the start, fraught with anxiety about various encroachments and attacks: the city where his brother dwells, more storied rivers, and industrial progress. Though he sets his poem in the present, Wordsworth portrays this river as much a part of the English past as of its present.

Thoreau, on the other hand, begins his journey to Maine full of eager anticipation. “Ktaadn” (the spelling Thoreau uses for what is today Mount Katahdin) is the narrative of his first trip to Maine, and one way to examine that particular narrative is to view it as Thoreau’s attempt at rhetorically mastering an initially unfamiliar landscape. Though each of the three shorter pieces does stand on its own, I will be reading them together as a full narrative of Thoreau’s progression towards a natural literacy in a previously foreign environment. Thoreau leaves for Maine on a hunt for an unsettled wilderness, a routine practice in American travel writing of the time. In this tradition, the significance of the journey and the writing of it consisted in simply “getting there.” The artist became the hero of his own journey—which replaced the heroic themes of mythology—by vanquishing physical objects en route to a destination. . . . In this displacement of the heroic from the work of art to the persona of the artist lay, perhaps, part of the attraction of unexplored territory for the American artist. (Novak 119)<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Barbara Novak, in *Nature and Culture*, contrasts the American search for wilderness with the simultaneous “major tradition” of travel writing in Europe, specifically England (119). The Grand Tour to the continent of Europe was an educational rite-of-passage for those who could afford it in England. Further, the Grand Tour, as compared to the American trip to the wilderness, was much more informed by history and culture. The sublimity of the Alps was offset by the splendour of Rome and Paris.

There is ample evidence of Thoreau playing the hero in “Ktaadn.” Though he may not offer any Wordsworthian “hailings” to start his trip, he is at pains to note every manmade mark on his travel in order to claim with a degree of pride that he has passed a final marker of civilization. These readings of evidence of human habitation are also invariably misreadings—in fact, Thoreau’s first trip to Maine can be read entirely as a series of these misreadings of a foreign environment. Thoreau is so eager to find the wilderness—unnamed, unmapped, untrodden—that he mistakenly finds it everywhere. These misreadings, situations in which Thoreau posits that he has just passed some sort of final human marker and will now face bravely the inhuman wilderness of Maine, only to see immediately a manmade marker proving just the opposite—is a common rhetorical pattern in “Ktaadn,” one of the primary ways Thoreau illustrates the difficulty of gaining a sort of natural literacy, either through natural history or through cartography, when reading an unfamiliar place.

In “Ktaadn,” Thoreau immediately fashions himself an explorer, one strongly linked to America’s Westward expansion. He notes that by traveling north “some hours only of travel . . . will carry the curious to the verge of a primitive forest, more interesting, perhaps, on all accounts, than they would reach by going a thousand miles westward” (4). One of his first stops is Enfield, a place that confounds Thoreau’s understanding of the very function of cartography. This small logging outpost, “like most of the 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” (8). If mapping ceases to have a reliable, organizing function in Maine, and if Thoreau is indeed in the “midst of . . . wilderness,” it must have been a surprise to find in Enfield “healthy and well-grown apple trees, in a bearing state” on the property of “the oldest settler’s house in this region” (8).

A subsequent misreading occurs when Thoreau and his companions begin a leg of their journey which takes them up the Penobscot River by symbolically “[l]eaping over a fence.” The prospect of crossing the final manmade barrier and then facing fully the unpeopled wilderness before him excites Thoreau: “There was no road further, the river being the only highway, and but half a dozen huts confined to its banks, to be met with for thirty miles; on either hand, and beyond, was a wholly uninhabited wilderness, stretching to Canada. Neither horse, nor cow, nor vehicle of any kind had ever passed over this ground” (16). From this point forward, after Thoreau’s group has passed all aspects of civilization, save a few small huts along the river, Thoreau encounters, in order, “a rude wooden railroad”; “Marm Howard’s,” in which Thoreau can see the “rude forefathers of a hamlet” (18); and “quite a field of corn” (21). Later, when leaving a subsequent camp, there are no fences to jump, but the move from camp to wilderness is just as starkly significant for Thoreau, and he is at great pains to fix the location exactly. It was “exactly twenty-nine miles from Mattawmakeag Point . . . and about one hundred from Bangor by the river.” And it was also “the last human habitation of any kind in this direction. Beyond, there was no trail” (35). He seems finally to have found the wilderness he has been searching for. His desire to experience the fear of the unknown is powerfully stated in these pages, and time and again it is frustrated. For example, Thoreau’s small traveling party of four paused at one point in their rowing and

listened to hear if the wolves howled, for this is a common serenade, and my companions affirmed that it was the most dismal and unearthly of sounds; but we heard none this time.—If we did not *hear*, however, we did *listen*, not without a reasonable expectation; that at least I have to tell,—only some utterly uncivilized, big throated owl hooted loud and dismally in the drear and boughy wilderness,

plainly not nervous about his solitary life, nor afraid to hear the echoes of his voice there. We remembered also that possible moose were silently watching us from the distant coves, or some surly bear, or timid caribou had been startled by our singing. (38)

They “listen” and “want” to hear wolves, but get rude owls; they look for bears or moose, but can only imagine them; they leave the last habitation to be found in Maine, only to pull their canoe up to a “camping ground McCauslin had been familiar with in his lumbering days,” which is well-marked enough for him to “[strike] it unerringly in the moonlight” (39). Natural literacy comes hard for Thoreau in “Ktaadn,” as his desire for wilderness causes him routinely to mistake exactly how traveled the woods are. Finding the line of demarcation of civilization from wilderness is why Thoreau comes to Maine in “Ktaadn.” Perhaps the surveyor in him wants to find these markers, but the land proves impervious to these designs.

Wordsworth, for his part, is invested in a similarly important search for origins in his journey along the Duddon. Where Thoreau wants to find the point in space that officially demarcates wilderness, Wordsworth’s sought-after origin is one in time—the moment in English history when the river first took its present form. His portrayal of the river as an organic life, described above by Wyatt as “the image of human development,” is also the story of the development of the river itself, and the second sonnet immediately mythologizes the river’s origin. Duddon is a “Child of the clouds” with the “handmaid Frost,” and this symbolic description of the physical birth of the river is matched by its historical presence in this area of England where in pre-Roman times there were

mighty forests, once the bison’s screen,

Where stalked the huge deer to his shaggy lair

Through paths and alleys roofed with darkest green;  
 Thousands of years before the silent air  
 Was pierced by whizzing shaft of hunter keen!" (2: 1,5,10-14)

Wordsworth's historical knowledge, his ability to read England's past from the present appearance of nature, has been described in previous chapters, but here his use of legend and myth is insufficient. He finds that when he focuses strictly on the river, there is a lack of any legible sign of its origin. He then faces a dilemma of representation: how to describe the river's temporal origin when its present appearance offers no clues. He foregrounds this question in an early sonnet describing the difficulties of figuring the unknowable into verse:

How shall I paint thee?—Be this naked stone  
 My seat, while I give way to such intent;  
 Pleased could my verse, a speaking monument,  
 Make to the eyes of men thy features known.  
 But as all those tripping lambs not one  
 Outruns his fellows, so hath Nature lent  
 To thy beginning nought that doth present  
 Peculiar ground for hope to build upon.  
 To dignify the spot that gives thee birth  
 No sign of hoar Antiquity's esteem  
 Appears, and none of modern Fortune's care. (3: 1-11)

There are no "signs," nothing "peculiar," of any significance to read; Wordsworth relies on myth out of a lack of other suitable options to be found in the rather ordinary ground at the beginning of the river. However, he does not share Thoreau's anxiety about reading the land accurately—



he never corrects a misreading. He can casually forgo his search for temporal origins, by offering a reading of the river as he sees it. Wordsworth ends this sonnet with just such an attitude of happy acquiescence. He addresses the river: “Yet thou thyself hast round thee shed a gleam / Of brilliant moss, instinct with freshness rare; / Prompt offering to thy Foster-mother Earth!” (3: 12-14). Taking his cue from the river, Wordsworth, in these early sonnets describing the youth of the river, is happy simply to notice the moss on the banks.

This strategy is consistent throughout all the sonnets upstream on the Duddon—the river’s symbolic youth and early adolescence are marked by the poet, who notes its origins with an easy reading and description of the path of the river. Wordsworth notes the flowers along the river that exist “ere yet our course [is] graced with social trees,” and likewise he describes “[w]here small birds warbled to their paramours” and “the hum of bees” (6: 1-4). The flowers come before the trees in the river’s history; the bees before birds. Each time his inquiries into the primary features of the river are thwarted, Wordsworth turns to the river itself to answer these questions by its very presence—its present legibility suffices in a way that also comforts him by calling on familiar aspects of pastoral poetry. The birds have sweethearts, the trees are good company, and the bees are in harmony. The river itself might suffice for Wordsworth because it brings with it all the comfort of idyllic pastoral scenes, if not a prelapsarian world.

The existence of the known river is the balm for Wordsworth’s compositional uncertainty. Where Thoreau seizes each manmade marker, invests it with great significance, and then is forced to confront his own misreadings, Wordsworth allows for the present materiality of the river to stand in for his inability to read its temporal signs in the ways he proposes. As he finds it impossible to gather signs of the origins of the river, so he does when he searches for

evidence of the first inhabitants along its banks. The idea of the very first man along the Duddon, a sort of Lake District Adam, fascinates him:

What aspect bore the Man who roved or fled,  
 First of his tribe, to this dark dell—who first  
 In this pellucid Current slaked his thirst;  
 What hopes came with him? what designs were spread  
 Along his path? His unprotected bed  
 What dreams encompassed?” (8: 1-6)

Nature gives him no answer to these questions, and he cannot discern any information from any sort of reading of the river. The fact that “no voice replies,” that “both air and earth are mute,” is an indication of his inability to read the history of a natural setting that he desires to find legible (8: 9). But the present materiality of Edenic the river comforts him again: “Thou, blue Streamlet, murmuring yield’st no more / Than a soft record, that” whatever sort of primitive man found his way to the shores “[t]hy function was to heal and to restore, / To soothe and cleanse, not madden and pollute!” (8: 10-14). As he begins his journey along the river, the fact that he cannot find any answers to his questions does not trouble him. If he can not understand the river, Wordsworth at least gains the benefit of experiencing something of a “soothing” and idyllic world.

Thoreau, however, is troubled; he is struggling to find some way to interpret and describe the land before him in a way he finds reliable. Nature itself is difficult for him to read accurately in “Ktaadn,” and so is the evidence of man. Thoreau is “strangely affected” by the “sight of a ring-bolt well drilled into a rock, and fastened with lead” on the shore of what he considers “solitary” Ambejjis Lake (41-42). This bolt signifies a human presence that leads Thoreau into

a meditation about the act of inscribing logs so their ownership can not be questioned. This practice in logging is one of the most literal moments of inscription in the text, a process so complicated (because of the size of the logging industry) that an entirely new language of signs is needed: “it requires considerable ingenuity to invent new and simple marks where there are so many owners. They have quite an alphabet of their own, which only the practiced can read” (42). Most baffling for Thoreau is the presence of a brick: “In the midst of a dense underwood we noticed a whole brick, on a rock, in a small run, clean and red and square as in a brick-yard, which had been brought thus far formerly for tamping” (45). If there was an established industry, or a brick yard, or a brick house, or even something to tamp, its presence would not baffle. But since Thoreau lacks the context for its presence in the woods, it becomes the generic mark of the human, one that can be placed anywhere to claim a sort of mastery of the natural, or at least an enduring human presence.

These are just a few of the many pieces of “simple evidence” of civilized man throughout the text (45); Thoreau encounters many more and notes each of them. He finds a tree with a patch of bark stripped and replaced with a billboard advertising clothing from Oak Hall. This tree is then spiritually (re)inscribed when Thoreau “christen[s]” it as “Oak Hall carry” (50). The travelers cross over rocks “covered with the *dents* made by the spikes in the lumberers’ boots” (52) and other large rocks “worn smooth with use” by lumberers resting their boats on them (51); the groups finds a “guide-post surmounted by a pair of Moose-horns, spreading four or five feet, with the word ‘Monson’ pointed on one blade, and the name of some other town on the other” (115). There is evidence of the human everywhere—Thoreau is not Adam in Maine, to be sure—and the human artifact continually challenges Thoreau’s ability to read the wilderness he has come to see.

Thoreau's natural literacy is most dramatically, and most famously, called into question in the literal and figurative climax of "Ktaadn"—the moment he alone ascends its summit. After this ascent, a significant feat in itself, as only two or three explorers previously had ever done so, he is faced with a completely inhospitable landscape with strong winds, low clouds barring nearly all visibility—it was “like sitting in a chimney” (63)—and nothing else but rock. Thoreau cannot begin to read this landscape, and he faces an immediate crisis of representation. He turns to metaphor of industry first, likening the barren rocks inundated by swirling clouds to a “cloud factory” or a “cloud works.” He then tries myth—the rocks are “creations of the old epic and dramatic poets, of Atlas, Vulcan, the Cyclops, and Prometheus” (64). This move to myth does not suffice since nature itself “pilfers” these heroic figures of their “divine faculty” and disallows language from even attempting any more metaphoric descriptions. He is then accosted by nature, called to account for himself: “why came you here before your time? This ground is not prepared for you. Is it not enough that I smile in the valleys? . . . I cannot pity nor fondle thee here, but forever relentlessly drive thee hence to where I am kind. Why see me where I have not called thee, and then complain because you find me but a stepmother?” (64). Wordsworth figures the Duddon according to pastoral traditions, while here Thoreau calls on another prominent discourse of nature in the nineteenth century: the mythic horror of the awe-inspiring sublime.

The materiality of nature that is an underpinning of comfort for Wordsworth as he travels along the Duddon River and searches for its origins does not suffice for Thoreau on top of Mount Katahdin. He ruminates on his experiences on the summit as he descends with his traveling party. While walking through landscape less daunting, he acknowledges that it “is difficult of conceive of a region uninhabited by man. We habitually presume his presence and influence

everywhere.” This is a misdiagnosis of the problem: he has been trying to impose a reading of “a region uninhabited by man” over a landscape that has, in fact, been home to the logging industry for the two centuries previous. Thoreau is actually presuming the absence of man in “Ktaadn.” When he does try to read the wild land he finds on the summit of Katahdin, he is unable to figure it; it simply exists apart from him:

This was that Earth of which we have heard, made out of Chaos and Old Night. . . . It was Matter, vast, terrific,—not his Mother Earth that we have heard of. . . . There was there felt the presence of a force not bound to be kind to man. . . . Here not even the surface had been scarred by man. . . . I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become so strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one,—*that* my body might,—but I fear bodies. . . . 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? (70-71)*

This crisis of representation shakes Thoreau deeply. His language is fragmented, and he is disoriented. This passage is the culmination of the questions of natural legibility that have confronted him throughout “Ktaadn,” and he has found no answers.

Wordsworth too suffers a moment of representational crisis along his Duddon journey, and it is surprisingly similar to Thoreau’s. Duddon’s “Ktaadn moment” is the point in sonnet fourteen where the Duddon’s path cuts down through rocky cliffs and away from the idyllic, green landscape that has sustained Wordsworth’s vision of the river throughout. Regardless of Wordsworth’s inability to read the history of the river, the Duddon’s present materiality has, to this point, remained legible. “O Mountain Stream!” Wordsworth implores at the beginning of

this sonnet, and he asks the river to recall the picture of the “Shepherd and his Cot” who have been the “privileged Inmates of deep solitude,” and who live near “a field or two of brighter green, or plot / Of tillage-ground, that seemeth a like a spot / Of stationary sunshine” (1: 2,4-6).

These are the images that have marked the river’s early path, but now the river has turned onto steeper and rockier ground. Wordsworth’s address to the river is accusatory. The pastoral images

content[] thee not.

Thee have some awful Spirit impelled to leave,

Utterly to desert, the haunts of men,

Though simple thy companions were and few;

And through this wilderness a passage cleave

Attend but by thy own voice, save when

The clouds and fowls of the air thy way pursue!” (8-14)

In this sonnet the river is selfish, going its own way, listening only to its “own voice,” possessed by “some awful Spirit.” The literal ground has changed dramatically, and Wordsworth is challenged by the river’s path swerving away from the green, domesticated fields where he has been traveling. The move between two very different types of landscape here is identical to Thoreau’s. Thoreau, too, followed “haunts of men” in Maine, even though he tried to move beyond them. Both writers are calling on the traditions of the sublime and the beautiful in these passages to define the different types of landscape they encounter. In their texts, they make the transition directly from the comforts of knowable, green, and smooth landscape—associated with Edmund Burke’s Beautiful—to vast scenes of the Sublime, featuring tumult, hostility, scenes filled with massive rocks, mythic creatures, and discord. Unlike the works

covered in the following section, in *The Maine Woods* and *The River Duddon*, even when the landscape is at its most horrifying, it can be described according to familiar discourse such as the sublime.

When Wordsworth follows the river through the “high cliffs of the rock gorge at Birks Brig” (Wyatt, *Poems of Travel* 37), he is as dumbstruck as Thoreau on Katahdin. His physical position is the opposite of Thoreau’s, however. Thoreau was on the top of a mountain and Wordsworth is in a “deep chasm, where quivering sunbeams play / Upon its loftiest crag.” He sees a “gloomy niche, capacious, blank, and cold; / A concave free from shrubs and mosses grey” (15: 1-4). The materiality of bare, “blank, and cold” nature confronts him and is complicated by a huge rock, what he calls “Some Statue,” present in his path, the origins of which he cannot figure. Like Thoreau, Wordsworth is forced to ask a strikingly similar series of questions to help him read this rock, questions that, again, much like Thoreau’s, call on history, religion and myth:

Was it by mortals sculptured?—weary slaves  
Of slow endeavour! or abruptly cast  
Into rude shape by fire, with roaring blast  
Tempestuously let loose from central caves?  
Or fashioned by the turbulence of waves,  
Then, when o’er highest hills the Deluge past?” (9-14)

The legibility of the present landscape that has sufficed in the Duddon sonnets is no longer familiar. The stark materiality of unreadable rock in a natural setting sends both writers in search of a creation myth to integrate the physical into a system of signification in which they

can participate. The physical landscape itself has forced these moments of representational crisis.<sup>3</sup>

There is another similarity between Wordsworth's and Thoreau's responses to illegible, stark materiality: tremendous excitement. These passages are the emotional highpoints of their respective narratives, and they are not the only case of such a response to the material world in their careers, as *The Prelude's* Gondo Gorge and *Walden's* Deep Cut are not dissimilar passages. For Wordsworth, these are landscapes that, even though they are found to be thrilling, are encountered unexpectedly. Thoreau, on the other hand, sets forth looking for such landscapes. Compositionally, it would seem that Wordsworth needs to be surprised to allow his texts the freedom of wonderment as he comes to sublimity hesitantly. Though Thoreau finds nature's illegibility vexing, he also utilizes it as a rhetorical blank space open to an ambitious series of attempted interpretations.

Though they have similar responses to similar physical environments, both writers escape from their crises through nearly opposite creative interpretations of the external world. Wordsworth turns away from the Duddon River entirely, titling the subsequent sonnet "American Tradition." It is a surprising move, one in which he disowns, and even mocks, the questions of natural legibility that the previous sonnets bring to a crisis:

Such fruitless questions may not long beguile  
 Or plague the fancy 'mid the sculptured shows  
 Conspicuous yet where Oroonoko flows;  
*There* would the Indian answer with a smile

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<sup>3</sup> Noah Heringman's *Romantic Rocks; Aesthetic Geology* offers an extended examination of the significance of the materiality of rocks in eighteenth and nineteenth-century England. "Rocks," he argues, "become preferred objects of description and explanation, poetic and otherwise, because they instantiate the most basic features of the physical environment" (6). See also John Wyatt's *Wordsworth and the Geologists*.



Aimed at the White Man's ignorance the while,  
 Of the Great Waters telling how they rose,  
 Covered the plains, and, wandering where they chose,  
 Mounted through every intricate defile,  
 Triumphant. (16: 1-9)

This is a transAtlantic glossing of wild water and rocky chasms: what is unreadable in England's domesticated green land is perfectly suited for the wild environs of America and the history of the Native American, whose myths can more easily handle such natural forms.

By sublimating his legitimate struggle to an "orientalized" story of a foreign people, Wordsworth evades the problem. It takes him several sonnets to get himself back to the Duddon itself, and he never describes it in subsequent sonnets with the casual ease of its simple materiality in the same way that he does in the first part of the sequence. Wordsworth titles the next sonnet "Return," and return to England he does, though he is nowhere near the present river: this sonnet follows a raven flying over ancient England's "mystic Round of Druid frame" (17: 12). The next several sonnets show Wordsworth approaching the present river, but never reaching it; each sonnet is a further filter—an alternate reading in an alternate time—of the river itself. Sonnet eighteen, "Seathwaite Chapel," reintroduces readers to Wordsworth's Pastor, most famous from *The Excursion*, whose era has passed. Wordsworth reminisces of the days

When this low Pile a Gospel Teacher knew,  
 Whose good works formed an endless retinue:  
 A Pastor such as Chaucer's verse portrays;  
 Such as the heaven-taught skill of Herbert drew;  
 And tender Goldsmith crowned with deathless praise. (18: 10-14)

These “old inventive Poets” are called on after the river’s current strongly increases, “and, with many a shock / Given and received in mutual jeopardy, / Dance[s], like a Bacchanal, from rock to rock / Tossing her frantic thyrsus wide and high” (20: 1,11-14). Wordsworth continues effacing the actual river with various versions of the past or the imagined presence of other rivers. Additionally, these copious literary allusions bring forth alternative reminiscences of England’s rural past.

Thoreau too has to find his way out of a landscape that is vexing to him. Where Wordsworth looks back in time or across the ocean to accomplish this, Thoreau looks down. He moves immediately from “*Who are we? where are we?*” back to the landscape itself to discover that: “Erelong we recognized some rocks and other features in the landscape which we had purposely impressed on our memories, and, quickening our pace, by two o’clock we reached the bateau” (93). This seemingly pedestrian, and somewhat awkward, transition is significant because Thoreau is able, finally, to read accurately the rocks themselves at the conclusion of “Ktaadn.” He answers his own question—“Where are we?”—by familiarizing himself with rocks that are better traveled and easier to read. This hard-earned literacy remains evident in Thoreau’s next trip to Maine. He is, on this second journey, a much better reader of natural signs. In fact what he has difficulty interpreting on this trip are primarily the unfamiliar sounds of Maine, not sights. At one point, Thoreau describes his Indian guide, Joe Aitteon, who is determined to kill a moose on the trip, repeatedly making moose calls. Thoreau finds Joe’s ability to hear nature extraordinary, particularly because he does not share it: Thoreau hears a moose approaching, Joe tells him it was a tree falling (103); he hears a wood chopper, and Joe tells him it is a moose (99). And even Joe has comic difficulties coming to terms with the sounds of Maine: when the group approaches some bushes in their canoe, Joe hears rustling and

whispers to the group that it is a bear, then he decides it is a beaver, and, after he shoots it, they realize he has killed a hedgehog (117).

In “Chesuncook,” Thoreau becomes more and more of a naturalist, with less desire to see what he expects and more patience to see what is there. The material world in “Chesuncook” sits better with him. When the other two men in his party were off hunting, Thoreau recalls sitting by the campfire, where he “examined by its light the botanical specimens which I had collected that afternoon, and wrote down some of the reflections which I have expanded” (120). It is in “Chesuncook” that Thoreau makes his famous meditation on the ability to see the pine tree:

Strange that so few ever come to the woods to see how the pine lives and grows and spires, lifting its evergreen arms to the light—to see its perfect success, but most are content to behold it in the shape of many broad boards brought to market, and deem *that* its true success! But the pine is no more lumber than man is. . . . There is a higher law affecting our relation to pines as well as to men. . . . Is it the lumberman then who is the friend and lover of the pine—stands nearest to it and understands its nature best? Is it the tanner who has barked it, or he who has boxed it for turpentine, whom posterity will fable was changed into a pine at last? No! no! it is the poet; he it is who makes the truest use of the pine. (121)

This is the Thoreau of *Walden*—the elusive and allusive maker of speeches. His reading has become more fluent, and he is less likely to misread his physical surroundings, but he was not yet a naturalist primarily as he would be late in his career when he made his final trip to Maine. However, as he moves away from the anxiety on Katahdin, his misreadings become less frequent and less charged with emotion.

After his turn to history and to America, Wordsworth attempts to regain the present as well, but not without a great deal of effort. In two separate sonnets, he calls for the return of the good cheer he experiences early in the sequence as he braces himself to continue following the river on its journey forward. “Sad thoughts, avaunt!” he calls out in sonnet twenty-three; “Return, Content!” cheers the start of sonnet twenty-six. What Wordsworth turns to in each is the same version of the present: the rural pastoral ideal. Sonnet twenty-three brings “[n]ature’s quiet equipoise” in the face of the “[c]lamour of boys” and “barking dogs” (7,6,5). In sonnet twenty-six, he returns to the solace found in his own childhood experiences of nature. He remembers that “fondly I pursued, / Even when a child, the Streams—unheard, unseen; / Through tangled woods, impending rocks between” (1-3). This return to the river remains a vision clouded by the past.

The problem for a series of sonnets about the path of a river figured as the path of one human life is that all lives lead to death. The river can only reach its maturity if it is also going to reach its end as well. By looking backwards, Wordsworth is tempering his own mortality and the river’s end by reading the river as ancient, even eternal.<sup>4</sup> When he turns to the thing itself, to the material world at his feet, and reads it as it is, he finds tremendous satisfaction. These moments do have the potential to unmoor him as we have seen in the Birks Brig Passage, but his natural literacy more often soothes. At the mature river, near the end of the sonnet series, and after a number of moments of casting his eye backwards to the past, he begins his journey again. The sonnet “Journey Renewed” places Wordsworth on the banks of the river at mid-afternoon:

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<sup>4</sup> This rationalizing of the process of aging, and the concomitant loss of creative agency, is a frequent strategy of Wordsworth: in “Tintern Abbey,” Wordsworth deflects his loss of innocence through the still-innocent figure of Dorothy; in *The Prelude* and the “Intimations Ode,” Wordsworth claims a superior type of solace in nature in maturity than the thoughtless one he experienced as a child; and, in “Elegiac Stanzas,” he both pities youthful innocence for its ignorance and tries to accept a divine salvation.

I rose while yet the cattle, heat-opprest,  
 Crowded together under rustling trees  
 Brushed by the current of the water-breeze;  
 And for their sakes, and love of all that rest,  
 On Duddon' margin, in the sheltering nest;  
 For all the startled scaly tribe that slink  
 Into covers, and each fearless link  
 Of dancing insects forged upon his breast;  
 For these, and hopes and recollections worn  
 Close to the vital seat of human clay;  
 Glad meetings, tender partings, that upstay  
 The drooping mind of absence, by vows sworn  
 In his pure presence near the trysting thorn—  
 I thank the Leader of my onward way. (28: 1-14)

This is, I think, a wonderful and unusual late Wordsworth poem. It is nearly Blakean, or Thoreauvian, in its celebration of “scaly” snakes and “dancing insects” that are also linked with the “vital,” but yet mortal and dirty, “human clay” (though neither Blake nor Thoreau would have much patience for thanks offered to a “Leader”). Wordsworth often talks about the life in all things, but rarely do we see what these things are, and in this poem, his eyes are solidly on the present ground.

As are Thoreau's. By the time he takes his final trip to Maine, he too is more at ease with the basic materiality of its woods, and much of his time during this trip is spent increasing this fluency through natural history and language lessons. Thoreau makes this trip to Maine explicitly

about fluency by deciding that he and his Native American guide, Joe Polis, should teach each other their respective languages: “I observed that I should like to go to school to him to learn his language. . . . ‘O, yer,’ he replied, ‘good many do so.’ I asked him how long he thought it would take. He said one week. I told him that in this voyage I would tell him all I knew, and he should tell me all he knew, to which he readily agreed” (168). Thoreau’s natural fluency is much improved as a result of the two previous trips and, more significantly, the years of naturalist collecting he has been doing in Concord. He no longer emphasizes Maine as a primordial wilderness, forcing a reading of each manmade mark that posits it as the final manmade mark. Instead, he sees the present materiality of Maine as the type of wilderness it is, one that can be elusive to read, but that remains legible nonetheless, through the discourses of botany, biology, and Native American languages.

Having found the remnants of a previous campground near where his party is setting up camp, Thoreau notes that “you might have gone within six feet of these signs without seeing them” (170). He finds that another camp was “on an old, and now more than usually indistinct, supply-road, running along the river. What is called a road there shows no ruts or trace of wheels, for they are not used; nor, indeed, of runners, since they are used only in the winter, when the snow is several feet deep. It is only an indistinct vista through the woods, which it takes an experienced eye to detect” (191). Thoreau has obviously gained this “experienced eye”; the road is not forced to be the last human mark in Maine, as similar human markers often were in “Ktaadn,” but readers do get a picture of what that road is like. One of the ways in which he finds Maine more legible is through his employment of his naturalist classification systems, and he is able to find some sort of order in the plants and trees surrounding him. As he reads better, his readings increase in richness. At this level of natural literacy, Maine becomes less about

what it symbolizes, and more about what it is. At one point Thoreau gives a long list of what vegetation he sees around him. He concludes this list by noting that “the nearest trees were *Betula papyracea* and *excelsa*, and *Populus tremuloides*,” explaining that he is only mentioning these “because it was my furthest northern point (234-35). This is a remarkable shift from the narrator who guides readers through his written account of a journey to Maine eleven years earlier. Indeed, the Maine woods remain significant to Thoreau, but they are significant for ways which fit with his greater understanding of the natural history of the region or with his ability to locate himself accurately on a map.

Thoreau has faced a crisis of readability in *The Maine Woods*, particularly in “Ktaadn.” However, by the end of the book, he is a reader of a familiar landscape, and “Chesuncook” and “The Allegash and East Branch” are the narratives of this increasing fluency that has brought with it an acceptance of landscape in Maine as it is. (The names of these narratives themselves signify an increasing ease with the present landscape. The names transition from obstacle [mountain] to fluency [rivers].) Thoreau originally turned to Maine and tried to establish it as a more potent image of the idealized Western settler culture. In the final book, when he looks for national significance in the woods through which he is traveling, he expresses it differently. He realizes that there are still places in Maine more remote than he has experienced, “places where [one] might live and die and never hear of the United States, which make such a noise in the world” (236). He admits this isolation is a myth, much like that of Prometheus, because he knows that Maine will one day be as settled as Massachusetts. However, the ability to erase the political boundaries of the country in Maine is something that has not been possible in the works he has written closer to home—by the end of *The Maine Woods*, the landscape does not have to

carry the burden of symbolic national significance. The United States does not have to factor into the description at all.

Wordsworth, on the other hand, does not follow Duddon to its end with the attitude of acceptance that he achieves in “Journey Renewed.” Snakes, insects, and clay do not have a large enough significance to figure the nation, as Wordsworth ultimately is at pains to do. At the end of the river, Wordsworth works quickly in the final sonnets to fashion a suitable version of England as a whole. Recalling the praise of the defensive “Mountains old” that protect the Lake District’s “ancient manners” in the introductory poem, Wordsworth acknowledges in sonnet twenty-nine that “[n]o record tells of lance opposed to lance, / . . . ‘mid these retired domains” or “of heroes, fallen, or struggling to advance, / Till doubtful combat issued in a trance / Of victory.” These ancient and unnamed soldiers who have died defending England along the shores of the Duddon are only remembered by “passing Winds” and waters that “chant their praise, inspiring scorn of power usurped” (29: 1-2,4-6,11,12-13). The evocation of a militant history of England, embodied in the rural hills, that has protected the progress of England’s “lawful sway” is the final version of the past that Wordsworth instills in the banks of the Duddon. He also reads a more benign history and national benevolence in the country churchyards the river passes towards its mouth:

How sweet were leisure! Could it yield no more  
 Than ‘mid that wave-washed Churchyard to recline,  
 From pastoral graves extracting thoughts divine;  
 Or there to pace, and mark the summits hoar  
 Of distant moon-lit mountains faintly shine,  
 Soothed by the River’s gentle roar. (31: 9-14).



Mountains are in the distance of this churchyard by a river where the “divine” mixes calmly with the river’s “gentle roar.” This is much the scene that begins the entire sequence in the poem addressed to Christopher Wordsworth: soothing sounds heard by moonlight in a rural village.

As the river and the sonnet series reach their respective ends, it becomes apparent that only very rarely has the Duddon River been the Duddon River. Each time the present river is read with the same sort of natural literacy that Thoreau brings to the woods in Maine in “The Allegash and East Branch”—regardless of the temporary pleasure or horror these readings offer him—Wordsworth turns away. He either experiences the hostility of the inanimate material world and turns back, literally, to greener pastures or he symbolically links this one river to other rivers. Like Thoreau in “Ktaadn,” Wordsworth in *The River Duddon* has ideological uses that inform his description of the river. And where Thoreau is confronted with misreadings he must rectify, Wordsworth’s misreadings—or over-readings—become forced. If the material river can be easily and purposefully misread, it is nearly always in order to read a historic, green, and rural world instead. As we have seen before, this green world for Wordsworth always has a national importance. The national significance of the Duddon is linked to that of England’s most famous river, the Thames.<sup>5</sup> Where the spirit of the Duddon mingles with the Thames, English commercial and military might can freely flow into the Lake District:

*now expands*

Majestic Duddon, over smooth flat sands

Gliding in silence with unfettered sweep!

Beneath an ampler sky a region wide

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<sup>5</sup> The Thames has often stood in for pastoral figurations of the English nation in poetry. Spencer repeats the refrain “Sweet Thames! run softly, till I end my song” in *Prothalamion* (1596). This refrain is repeated by Eliot in “The Fire Sermon” in *The Wasteland* (176, 183, 184), and Pope too refashions the phrase in his poem “Spring” from *Pastorals* (1709): “Fair Thames flow gently from thy sacred Spring” (3).

Is opened round him:—hamlets, towers, and towns,  
 And blue-topped hills, behold him from afar;  
 In stately mien to sovereign Thames allied  
 Spreading his bosom under Kentish downs,  
 With commerce freighted, or triumphant war. (32: 6-14)

Though dramatically set in the present “now,” the Duddon River is still grounded by the echoes and values of the past, particularly the rural, green past of “gliding” rivers, “hamlets, towers, and towns” and “blue-topped hills,” only, at this point, one passes through these pastoral locations in order to reach the might of imperial England. What gives much of Wordsworth’s poetry its distinctive power in this series is the conflict he brings to his reading of the river—the temporal present on the banks of the river in constant struggle with the balm of English history and pastoral representations. The Duddon itself, and the reading of it Wordsworth creates, is what makes vibrant the rural values that he finds linked to the nation as a whole.

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In Maine and along the banks of the Duddon River, Thoreau and Wordsworth respectively find the land underfoot legible, at least at times, and they are brought to similar moments of crisis when they confront unreadable materiality—rocks, clouds, water, and forests. As I have been arguing, travel writing for both writers is the story of interaction with legible land. This section focuses on strategies that the two use to situate problematic landscape. In *Cape Cod* and *Memorials of a Tour of the Continent*, both writers face extended “Ktaadn” moments, long journeys on which they continually confront an alien, hostile, and illegible world.

The landscape Thoreau encounters is unlike anything he has experienced before—stranger than Maine’s and impossible to read. As it the case with *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau’s *Cape Cod* is the story of three separate journeys to the same place, the last trip occurring in 1855, just two years before his final trip to Maine. However, nowhere in this narrative does he develop an ability to read the material world he encounters. One way to read *Cape Cod* is as a meditation on seeing the unfamiliar; indeed, “one of Thoreau’s concerns in the work is vision itself” (Miller 185). These unique challenges to Thoreau’s visual acumen—his ability to discover some sort of natural legibility as he did in Maine—stem from the existence of an entirely different visual world: as Naomi Miller explains, “this travel narrative is not just about a different physical location, but about another world of awareness” (186).

Wordsworth’s poems also feature a return trip of sorts—the 1820 journey reprises, in reverse, the same basic path he and Robert Jones took three decades earlier (Jarvis 323). Unlike the foreign world Thoreau finds, the landscape Wordsworth encounters when he arrives is all too readable. In nearly every poem in the collection, he is confronted with a familiar landscape now devastated by the Napoleonic wars or altered by reason of unfamiliar and distasteful customs, most often Catholic ceremonies. His reading of nature requires a conscious misprision of the foreign environment as one embodying the green, rural values he has ostensibly left behind.

Wordsworth’s trip to the continent was made very shortly after travel was again possible to Switzerland and France after Napoleon’s final defeat (Wyatt, *Poems of Travel* 64). The itinerary took Wordsworth’s party from Dover to Calais on the tenth of July, 1820, and then to Belgium, Germany, Switzerland, the Italian lakes and Milan, and then back to Switzerland and France. After a month in Paris, the party returned to England on November 7, 1820 (Jarvis 323). The trip held great significance for Wordsworth. He was traversing landscape that he cherished;

his descriptions of the earlier walking tour with Jones are some of the emotional high points of *The Prelude*. Further, Wordsworth was one of the first tourists to come to the Continent in the immediate aftermath of the wars. For an entire generation, the “Napoleonic wars . . . all but stopped the Grand Tour dead in its tracks” (Jarvis 323). As Wordsworth was to see first hand, the effect of these wars on the physical landscape was dramatic. Wordsworth’s publication decision belies its importance to the poet as well. According to Robin Jarvis, out of the thousands of published travel narratives in English, in verse and in prose, there was no precedent for a multi-generic, single volume tour book in verse such as “*Memorials*” (324). Much as the title *Lyrical Ballads* two decades before had declared the work’s inventiveness, this book was to be an announcement of a new style of writing.

In the Duddon sonnets, Wordsworth is haunted by change and loss; these experiences are only amplified in *Memorials*. He need not speculate on the devastation wrought by the passage of time and the inevitable loss of life caused by war; he sees it first hand in the scarred landscape. Additionally, he feels a sense of personal loss on this trip, as retracing his steps with Jones brings him again to the sublime horror of Simplon Pass. As Jarvis argues, Wordsworth is “not only revisiting the actual scenes of former travels but also returning to the imagination’s personal, sacred sites and reappraising the grounds of his creativity” (323). Perhaps the most emotionally charged experience of all is his reunion with Annette Vallon and his daughter Caroline. Wordsworth’s experience of this fraught landscape is expressed in the poetry. As Jarvis describes them, taken as a whole, the poems in *Memorials* “comprise a keen sense of mutability in both personal and public realms: profound consciousness of time made visible in the movement from place to place, and in the association of place with layers of personal and literary history, and with the war and politics of the Napoleon era” (343).

Wordsworth becomes uncomfortable the moment he steps off the boat in France. He sees, in Calais, women selling fish by the docks and is struck by their ugliness and by how much they resemble the fish they are selling. Wordsworth's sonnet describes how horrifying it would be to encounter them, like fish, in the sea: "How fearful were it down through opening waves / To sink, and meet them in their fretted caves, / Withered, grotesque, immeasurably old, / And shrill and fierce in accent!" (1: 6-9). Not only are they ugly, but they are old and hard to understand. It is an unconventional way for Wordsworth to begin a tour book; he does not often resort to caricature in his poetry. But the unfamiliarity is real and repeatedly expressed, and it is not only a visual assault. Wordsworth cannot make sense of the sounds he hears either. In the Swiss valley of Lauterbrunnen, Wordsworth approaches a famous waterfall on the Staubbach River and is confronted with the sounds of peasant women singing in a way that defies his ability to describe. He wonders "what strange service" the voices could be employed by so "near the dwellings of mankind!" The sound cannot be a "Mermaid's warble" and might be "Witch answering Witch, / To chant a love spell." Whatever the sound's significance, he feels "regret and useless pity haunt / This bold, and this bright, this sky-born, Waterfall" (12: 2-3,5,7-8,13-14). There is, apparently, no poetic license in this description. According to Wordsworth's own notes to this poem, "this wild and savage air was utterly unlike any sounds I had ever heard," and it evoked ideas of "religious services chanted to Streams and Fountains in Pagan times" (*Complete Works* 707). The sounds and sights of the Continent—"fearful," "grotesque," "withered," "savage," and "wild"—are all utterly foreign and ugly to Wordsworth.

The ugliness confronting Thoreau immediately on Cape Cod is much more terrible. A ship has wrecked the night before, and Thoreau arrives on the scene as bodies are being washed to the shore and identified, while hundreds of locals observe the spectacle, and many go to the

water's edge to claim any valuables that might drift to shore. His details are gruesome.

Unlike the landscape he will soon travel, the bodies themselves are legible, and Thoreau does not hesitate to detail the "many marbled feet and matted heads" that he sees (5). There is little sympathy expressed in these difficult-to-read passages. "Sometimes," Thoreau sees, "two or more children, or a parent and child in the same" rough coffin, and he finds one dead child washed to shore wrapped in her dead aunt's arms. Thoreau describes coolly how the woman who found her child and sister like this "within three days . . . died from the effect of that sight" (6). The beach that is literally marked by human bodies seems easy for him to integrate and come to terms with. Shipwrecks on Cape Cod were a fact of life in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth. The inhabitants of the Cape go on about their lives, and so must Thoreau with his journey. He sees a man collecting kelp and seaweed amidst the remnants of the disaster as if "those bodies were to him but other weeds which the tide cast up, but which were of no use to him" (9). Thoreau's response is much the same. A bit further down the shore "[n]ot a vestige of a wreck was visible, nor could I believe that the bones of many a shipwrecked man were buried in that pure sand. But to go on with our first excursion" (14). Thoreau's first expression of being unsettled while standing among this wreckage comes when he notes the power of nature where there is no human presence. He exclaims, "I was even more surprised at the power of the waves, exhibited on this shattered fragment" of wood from the ship (7).

When he reaches to the town of Dennis, Thoreau finds a landscape that he can not liken to anything he knows. It was "such an exceedingly barren and desolate country, of a character which I can find no name for." He links this condition to the ocean: it was like "the bottom of the sea made dry land day before yesterday" (20). It is this proximity to water that makes this landscape unlike any other. He notes, "Everything told of the sea, even when we did not see its

waste or hear its roar. For birds there were gulls, and for cars in the fields, boats turned bottom upward against the houses, and sometimes the rib of a whale was woven into the fence by the roadside” (25). Ultimately, Thoreau finds the proximity to the ocean affects Cape Cod everywhere, resulting in an entire landscape that is topsy-turvy.

There is a good deal of Swift’s Gulliver in Thoreau’s narrative while on Cape Cod. For example, Thoreau is “amused” by the “old oaks” of Truro that he calls “Lilliputian.” However, *Cape Cod* is not a book in the vein of satire, at least not explicitly. It is funny in its satirical portrayal of local inhabitants—one of whom spits tobacco during dinner with such inaccuracy and volume that Thoreau and his companion later argue about which dishes were safe to eat. Thoreau is frequently satirical in his writing when it comes to his interactions with other people, but he does not write *Cape Cod* to be satirical, as Swift does in *Gulliver’s Travels*. Cape Cod’s topsy-turvy landscape is not a metaphor for anything else, or, at least, not primarily a metaphor. The landscape of Cape Cod is itself foreign to Thoreau; he has never seen a human or natural habitat previously. The near constant wind coming off the ocean, coupled with sandy soil, dwarfs the vegetation that grows near the shore. This phenomenon causes even familiar trees, such as oaks, to look miniature. Thoreau’s natural history classifications are called into question on the Cape because the land itself cannot be read according to any sort of normal size or scale. Seeing a man walk towards them on the sand, Thoreau observes that the man “loomed like a giant,” and when they meet and the man is not of Brobdingnagian size, Thoreau complains, “[T]o an inlander, the Cape landscape is a constant mirage” (32).

The uninhabited beach and sand dunes similarly present a challenge to Thoreau’s sense of vision. He finds that without having some sort of familiar landmass in the background for comparisons of scale, he is unable to judge the size of anything he sees in the distance. He is as

perplexed by this loss of scale for distant objects as he is by the small size of vegetation. His Concord vision does not suffice on the Cape. Thoreau sees “a family a-blueberrying a mile off, walking about the amid the dwarfish bushes which did not come up higher than their ankles, they seemed to me to be a race of giants, twenty feet high at least” (105). Looking to the water is just as perplexing: “as we looked out over the water, the smallest object floating on it appeared indefinitely large” (52).

This loss of perspective is not the only factor contributing to Thoreau’s confusion. The very Cape itself seems to be moving. Thoreau recounts that someone told him “that a log canoe known to have been buried many years before on the Bay side at East harbor in Truro, where the Cape is extremely narrow, appeared at length on the Atlantic side, the Cape having rolled over it” (120-21). He sees fenced front yards that are nothing but sand with “[b]each-grass growing in them, as if they were sometimes covered by the tide.” They looked like “portions of the beach fenced in” (155). And because nearly every family is involved in the fishing industry, these front yards are used to dry out cod in the summer, “so that instead of looking out into a flower or grass plot, you looked on to so many square rods of cod turned wrong side outwards” (168). For Thoreau, this is a “place of wonders” (107). For all his misreadings in Maine, Thoreau sees the woods of Maine as worthwhile to experience on occasion. On the Cape, he “shuddered at the thought of living there.” The views are so dominated by the barren and immense seascape that “the walker would soon eat his heart” as walk the beach (107). This topsy-turvy way of life cannot be read; Thoreau experiences no increase in natural literacy as he does in *The Maine Woods*, nor does he seem to desire it. While Thoreau does bestow the occasional word of admiration upon the logger, he says nothing positive of the fisherman. In Maine, he hunts a moose with Joe Aitteon from a canoe; he never once goes out on a fishing boat on the Cape.



When Wordsworth is dismayed by an unfamiliar landscape while on his tour, on the other hand, he has some reliable strategies to mitigate this foreignness. Many of the poems in *Memorials* read the most unfamiliar aspects of the trip by emphasizing the restorative power of nature. For example, when confronted by what he thinks are the excessive and gaudy rites of Catholicism, Wordsworth must remind himself not to chide Catholic practitioners: “It ill befits us to disdain / The alter, to deride the fane, / Where simple Sufferers bend, in trust / To win a happier hour.” The acceptance of these “Sufferers,” however, does not occur in the church itself. Wordsworth distances himself from this altar, and instead of seeing Catholics kneeling in their pews, he looks outside of the chapel window in order to set the entire scene in a vista containing a rural chapel among the green hills:

I love, where spreads the village lawn,  
 Upon some knee-worn cell to gaze:  
 Hail to the firm unmoving cross,  
 Aloft, where pines their branches toss!  
 And to the chapel far withdrawn,  
 That lurks by lonely ways!” (15: 3-5,6-12)

Wordsworth can “withdraw” his gaze just far enough so that the cross is just another pine tree, and his pew a convenient vantage point for a view of the hills.

This naturalizing of the foreign is more dramatic in the case of scenes marred by evidence of battles fought there or nearby. The first poem to deal explicitly with the Napoleonic Wars is the fifth, the haunting “After Visiting the Field of Waterloo.” Unlike many of the other places he visits, this famous spot, ironically, has no battle scars. Wordsworth finds

prospect blank and cold

Of wind-swept corn that wide around us rolled  
 In dreary billows, wood and meager cot,  
 And monuments that soon must disappear.” (5: 6-9)

Here are all the makings of a Wordsworth poem—the site of a tyrant’s defeat, featuring lush fields and surrounding trees that will outlast the manmade monuments, all mixed with an ominous dread. But the power here comes not from what is visible; Wordsworth reads instead what is not. There is no sign of the huge numbers of dead that just five years earlier must have been strewn across the landscape, and nature’s power to triumph over time constitutes an insult to the dead. Wordsworth feels as “men *should* feel / With such vast hoards of hidden carnage near, / And horror breathing from the silent ground” (12-14). Wordsworth reads the dead in the ground in such a way as to efface the newly resurgent nature. This response to mass human death is the opposite of Thoreau’s inhuman experience of the dead on Cape Cod. The Cape’s present bodies signify nothing; Waterloo’s absence of bodies remains devastatingly meaningful.

This pattern does not hold, however. In the next sonnet, set just a few miles to the east of Waterloo, between the towns of Namur and Liege, nature regains its power. This poem offers a rebuttal to the previous one, asking, “Is this the stream, whose cities, heights, and plains, / War’s favorite playground, are with crimson stains familiar?” (6: 2-3). There are more cornfields here, more trees, and signs of recent war as well. But when Wordsworth turns his eyes “from the fortified and threatening hill,” he notes, “How sweet the prospect of yon watery glade, / With its grey rocks clustering in pensive shade” (6: 9-12). Here, in the face of heavy defensive fortifications and with the memory of blood-stained fields, Wordsworth finds comfort in nature’s enduring power. He has also removed himself from the actual battlefield of Waterloo, and though he emphasizes the blood in the streams, there were no major battles fought in either

Namur or Liege that he must confront. That the landscapes are much the same—all within a few miles from each other in western Belgium—seems not to matter. The imagined breath of the thousands of dead rising up from Waterloo is what haunts Wordsworth, and nature comes to dominate a setting when it is even slightly removed from this recent history.

By the time Wordsworth reaches Fort Fuentes, above Lake Como in Italy, he can read nature as fully restorative. This fort was already a ruin before the time of Napoleon, but even now, as they ascend to it, Mary Wordsworth notes in her journal how the “[d]wellings [were] all desolated by those barbarians, the French” (68). Outside the church, the traveling party remarkably finds an undamaged marble statue of a child lying amid the weeds and grasses “to couch in this thicket of brambles alone” (23: 4). Wordsworth is struck by this figure of the pure child, surrounded by nature in the shadows of the ruined church just outside the fort. The statue seems placed there

To rest where the lizard may bask in the palm  
 Of his half-open hand pure from blemish or speck;  
 And the green, gilded snake, without troubling the calm  
 Of the beautiful countenance, twine round his neck;  
 Where haply . . .  
 When winter the grove of its mantle bereaves,  
 Some bird . . . may strew  
 The desolate Slumberer with moss and with leaves. (23: 5-12)

This one statue lying among the evidence of nature’s resurgence offers inspiration to Wordsworth: nature, and its benevolent, yet ceaseless, enterprises will always overcome the

horrors of human destruction. Where the “silent ground” at Waterloo brings him “horror,” at Fort Fuentes nature’s silence is simple and stark evidence of its greater-than-human power:

Now gads the wild vine o’er the pathless ascent:—

O silence of Nature, how deep is thy sway,

When the whirlwind of human destruction is spent,

Our tumults appeased, and our strifes passed away! (23: 17-20)

It is striking that nature here and at Waterloo is equally silent. According to Jarvis, this “reverential feeling for the ‘silence of nature’ is explained” by Wordsworth’s “grateful recognition that there is a form of sway more potent and durable than that of the former emperor” (337). Not only is he grateful for the example of nature’s potency, but also into this silence, Wordsworth is able to speak. No longer are the breathings of the dead haunting the poem and forcing the poet into silence as well. In “Fort Fuentes,” Wordsworth himself responds to the silence, and, by an act of poetic will, reads nature’s eventual encroachment as triumph, not tragedy.

On Cape Cod, Thoreau also turns to familiar strategies in order to gain some sort of control over the landscape. During his visits with the Wellfleet Oysterman, Thoreau has a number of conversations that seem to be comedic parodies of those he had in Maine with Joe Polis during the time in which each decided to teach the other his language. The Oysterman “took pleasure in telling us the names of the ponds, most of which we could see from his windows, and making us repeat them after him, to see if we had got them right” (69). Thoreau and the Oysterman also have a long conversation about whether or not the word “Axy” exists, and if it does exist, they debate its possible spelling, its meaning, and whether or not one could find it in the Bible. The Oysterman and his wife are sure they have read it there; Thoreau

remains unconvinced (74). As they leave him for the last time, they take doughnuts along with them, which pleases the Oysterman when he realizes “that we called them by the same name that he did.” Before they leave, “he followed us out of doors, and made us tell him the names of the vegetables which he had raised from seeds. . . . They were cabbage, broccoli, and parsley. As I had asked him the names of so many things, he tried me in turn with all the plants which grew in his garden, both wild and cultivated” (78). They are speaking the same language and this wordplay is obviously greatly amusing for Thoreau, as it centers on both natural history and local color. But despite the humor, the complete illegibility of Cape Cod remains—Thoreau needs a new language to understand even garden-variety vegetables.

He fares somewhat better on Cape Cod when he relies on his expertise as a natural historian. In Maine, the more familiar he becomes with the wilderness, the more aware he is of the flora and fauna surrounding him. On the beach, he brings this attention to the detail of the natural world—the literacy of a near-professional biologist that defines his late career in Concord—and identifies, complete with their Linnaean names, species of clams, barnacles, periwinkles, crabs, fish, and one sponge (86-87). It is the most extensive passage of classification in the entire account, and one of the very few times he even attempts such work. However, this too proves unreliable when he tries to identify the blackfish—a hugely important type of sea mammal to the whaling industry of Cape Cod—when he returns home.<sup>6</sup> He examines the “zoological surveys of the State” but cannot find any information. He tries “Emmons’s Report of the Mammalia, but was surprised to find” no mention of the creature there either. His struggle to identify that particular animal is emblematic of Thoreau’s sense of the utter foreignness of the Cape. He is astonished:

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<sup>6</sup> Perhaps Thoreau’s trouble comes from the fact that the term “blackfish” can refer to any number of dolphins and whales. However, on Cape Cod, he was probably referring to the pilot whale.

Considering how this State has risen and thriven by its fisheries,—that the legislature which authorized the Zoological Survey sat under the emblem of a codfish,—that an early riser may find a thousand or fifteen hundred dollars' worth of blackfish on the shore in a morning,—that the Pilgrims saw the Indians cutting up a blackfish on the shore at Eastham, and called a part of the shore “Grampus Bay,” from the number of blackfish they found there. . . and that from that time to this these fishes have continued to enrich one or two counties almost annually, and that their decaying carcasses were now poisoning the air of one county for more than thirty miles,—I thought it remarkable that neither the popular nor scientific name was to be found in a report on our mammalia,—a *catalogue* of the productions of our land and water. (115)

This passage displays a number of ways to know a blackfish. Thoreau knows them historically, economically, culturally, and sensually through their odor. What troubles him greatly in this passage is that they can not be scientifically classified according to natural history. This lengthy objection to the various “report[s] on our mammalian” belies how much he bases his understanding of the world through his biological classifications and collections. In Concord, he planned to make a “Kalendar”—a record of the natural history of one typical year. In Maine, he came more comfortable in the environment as a direct result of his improved understanding of that unique ecosystem. On Cape Cod, he can not even classify a blackfish.

If what Thoreau learns on Cape Cod does not translate to what he knows in Concord, the reverse is also true. His Concord expertise can not be used to make sense of the foreign landscape. With some symbolic significance, Thoreau approaches the “Cape Cod or Highland” lighthouse, which is “first seen by those approaching the entrance of Massachusetts Bay from

Europe,” in order to survey it. This surveying is as detailed an operation and undertaken with as much seriousness as is his survey of Walden Pond in *Walden*. For the survey of the lighthouse, he details the procedure: “I borrowed the plane and square, level and dividers, of a carpenter who was shingling a barn near by, and using one of those shingles made of a mast, contrived a rude sort of quadrant, with pins for sights and pivots, and got the angle of elevation of the Bank opposite the lighthouse, and with a couple of cod-lines the length of its slope, and so measured its height on the shingle.” He gets a precise measurement—110 feet up from its base, and 123 feet from “mean low water.” However, on the Cape, this type of precision is more than likely not possible; there is nothing on Cape Cod that can be read as just so many feet, including the just-measured lighthouse. Thoreau learns from the keeper of the lighthouse that “the Cape is wasting away here on both sides. . . . In some places it had lost many rods within the last year, and ere long, the light-house must be moved” (118). There is no reliable measure, no reliable language, no reliable natural history; Cape Cod completely stymies Thoreau’s natural literacy. His account of the Cape is one of paradox and is built on unstable foundations. In fact, the very act of writing the narrative of Cape Cod proves impossible as each page he writes seemingly contradicts the previous. He knows the impossibility of his task: “The annals of this voracious beach! who could write them, unless it were a shipwrecked sailor?” (128). For all Thoreau’s compositional skills, he is never an empathetic writer—he will never know how to experience like a sailor, shipwrecked or not. The landscape of the Cape presents itself as unknowable. Thoreau cannot walk it to understand it, nor can he map it, nor study it in natural history books. All the strategies this project has shown Thoreau to be an expert in fail him on Cape Cod.

As Wordsworth follows the Duddon River to its mouth, he describes the national characteristics that link it to the Thames. In *Memorials*, Wordsworth also keeps England at the

forefront of his experience of foreign land throughout the trip. His evocation of English national values in the various places he visits on his tour of the Continent is his most consistent strategic intervention to the end of demonstrating his literacy, a literacy that can no longer simply be called “natural.” Instead, what is displayed in these poems is a national literacy, albeit one that is almost always linked to the natural. Wordsworth falters when his ability to read the features of a landscape is hindered. Those landscapes are then filled with historical remembrances, both mythological and personal, of a nation steadied by its permanent links to a green, rural world. In *Memorials*, when confronted time and again with images that are hostile to his understanding, he emphasizes England above all else.

The first stop on their tour brings the party to Bruges, where Wordsworth is initially struck by the quiet peacefulness of the streets. He finds “[t]he Spirit of Antiquity” creates a “city [that is] one great temple” (3: 1,10). This peace is much like the unexpected stillness Wordsworth observes in London when overlooking the city from Westminster Bridge, when he claims he “never felt a calm so deep” (“Composed Upon Westminster Bridge, *Complete Works* 11). However, unlike the scene in London, the peace in Bruges is broken in the very next poem, also set in Bruges, when Wordsworth hears through open windows the singing of a nun in her convent. This singing is not foreign; indeed, the nun sings in English and her voice has a “thrilling power” in it, “fit for some gay thong” (4: 8,9). It is just this reminder of home that disturbs Wordsworth and causes his unnamed companion to cry. Instead of hearing a “thrilling” song in a beautiful and quiet old European town, Wordsworth interprets the song as evidence of the Catholic Church’s imprisonment of a free English woman. In his reading, his companion’s tear becomes a way of honoring England’s freedom; the nun’s song a lament for English freedom lost:



Less tribute could [his companion] pay than this [tear],  
 Borne gaily o'er the sea,  
 Fresh from the beauty and the bliss  
 Of English liberty?" (4: 37-40)

Wordsworth has a similar response to hearing the "Ranz des Vaches," the well-loved Swiss song originally associated with sheep herders in the Alps. Though Wordsworth is "[m]indful of how others by this simple Strain / Are moved" to think of "green Alpine pastures decked / With vernal flowers" in Switzerland, the song does not inspire him similarly. Rather than simply remain unaffected by a song associated with a landscape and a country not his own, Wordsworth complains that the "joys of distant home my heart enchain" (22: 9,6-7,14). His response to these different songs is dramatic and consistent: he hears English songs that remind him of England's freedom, and Swiss songs—sung by citizens of perhaps the most "free" country in Europe—that remind him he is "enchained" in Europe, thus recalling English freedom by comparison.

Wordsworth is chained by the sights of Europe, as much as by its sounds, even the most remarkable ones. On the seventh of September, while rowing on Lake Lugano at the foot of the Alps, Wordsworth and his party were surprised by a solar eclipse. For Wordsworth, this eclipse transforms the landscape into "something night and day between, like moonshine—but the hue was green; / Still moonshine, without shadow, spread, / On jutting rock, and curved shore." This transformation excites Wordsworth, and he imagines how much land this swath of green-darkness could cover: "It tinged the Julian steeps—it lay, Lugano! / On thy ample bay. . . . But fancy with the speed of fire / Hath past to Milan's loftiest spire" (27: 25-28,31-38). The next several stanzas feature the tint of the eclipse mingling in his imagination with the spires and

figures atop the Cathedral of Milan. After this moment, the entire tenor of the poem changes.

Ultimately, Wordsworth figures the sight of the eclipse as a way to access the Lake District. In his final descriptions of longing for home, he rewrites the landscape of England directly over the one which is before him in Italy. Addressing his family members left at home in the Lake District, Wordsworth wonders about the effect of the eclipse on them. He asks:

O Ye, who guard and grace my home  
 While in far-distant lands we roam,  
 What countenance hath this Day put on for you?  
 While we look round with favoured eyes,  
 Did sullen mists hide lake and skies  
 And mountains from your view?  
 Or was it given you to behold  
 Like vision, pensive though not cold,  
 From the smooth breast of gay Winandermere?  
 Saw ye the soft yet awful veil  
 Spread over Grasmere's lovely dale,  
 Helvellyn's brow severe? (27: 67-78)

It is as if the dimming of light caused by the eclipse allows Wordsworth to superimpose one lake directly on top of the one on which he is rowing. Even such a spectacle—an unexpected eclipse on an Italian lake with the Alps in the distance—evokes the landscape of England.

The final four poems in *Memorials* are all concerned with Wordsworth's return to England. Two take place in Dover, a city on the English Channel known for its population growth in the early nineteenth century and for its maritime industries, and not necessarily for its

pastoral quietude. But it is just this quietude that Wordsworth finds; Dover is so quiet, in fact, that its silence is the subject of one of these final poems, “At Dover”:

musing, and with increase

Of wonder, I have watched this sea-side Town,

Under the white cliff’s battlemented crown,

Hushed to a depth of more than Sabbath peace. (37: 1-4)

The peace exists despite the normal amount of traffic—“the streets and quays are thronged” (37: 5). In fact, there is no actual quiet. The “social noise” and “natural utterance” of the city remain; however, the ocean—“the dread voice that speaks from out the sea / Of God’s eternal Word”—drowns out these sounds of life. All the vice a visitor might expect in the city, the “shocks of tumult, shrieks of crime, / The shouts of folly, and the groan of sin,” have been “deaden[ed] by the sounds of the sea (37: 7,6,11-12,13-14). There are no ugly fish women speaking in foreign tongues here, merely the crime and sin of a rapidly changing and growing British city on the sea that is blessed by the Channel that brings with it the Word of God. The quiet he describes can only be the quiet of comfort at the prospect of a return to home.

After all, this Channel speaking God’s Word is the same one that in France in the previous poem causes Wordsworth to exclaim, “Why cast ye back upon the Gallic shore / Ye furious waves! A patriotic Son / Of England” (35: 1-3). This is said, however, in Boulogne, when a storm forces the Wordsworth party to remain in France yet another day. He attacks the water because of its connection to the tyranny of Napoleon. In Boulogne, he is close enough to England to see it, but it remains unobtainable:

My Country’s cliffs I can behold,

And proudly think, beside the chafing sea,

Of checked ambition, tyranny controlled,  
 And folly cursed with endless memory. (35: 9-12)

Once in Dover and immediately off the boat, Wordsworth finds that “[p]eace greets” him, finally, in the form of a welcome vision of “majestic herds of cattle” (36: 6). What is noteworthy for Wordsworth is not the fact of the cows, but instead that they are “free / To ruminate, couched on the grassy lea; / And hear far-off the mellow horn proclaim / The Season’s harmless pastime. Ruder sound / Stirs not” (36: 6-10). Seeing these free cows gives Wordsworth a “strange delight” that finds “the rural stillness more profound” (36: 10,14). In one poem, Wordsworth lambastes the sea for keeping him prisoner in a tyrannical, foreign land, and in the next the sea holds God’s Word and cows are emblematic of English freedom. Wordsworth’s national-natural literacy is rather like a Claude Glass itself. He can pack it with him during his travels and take it out when he finds a view that requires some adjustment; at which point he turns his back to the actual scene and looks through his lens. But instead of an auburn tint, he sees Grasmere.

The tour poetry of the Duddon sonnets and *Memorials* taxed Wordsworth in a way not seen in his other works discussed in this project. The *Guide to the Lakes*, published with the Duddon series, and *The Excursion* both feature an author more comfortable narrating his environment. Wyatt describes the type of vision found in these travel writings as “Olympian” and argues that from 1820 forward Wordsworth is “looking outwards, further along the Alps into the troubled history of a continent and forwards into a future for humanity. . . . He now takes on the role of interpreter and prophet” (*Poems of Travel* 79). Interpreter and prophet are insightful terms to apply to Wordsworth here, and they work well for some genres of writing about places; for example, in *The Excursion* the Pastor is an excellent interpreter and the Wanderer is certainly a prophet. But in the genre of travel writing, these mantles do not fit as well; the attention that

Wordsworth must pay to the materiality of the ground he is covering makes travel writing difficult work for an Olympian prophet. Even in the *Guide* and *The Excursion*—when he is at home in the Lake District—the “future for humanity” that he is prophesizing is firmly rooted in the rural past.

Dorothy Wordsworth’s journal from the tour makes no mention of the eclipse they saw though she has a rather long entry for that day. Wordsworth’s poem describes how the emotional power of the eclipse leads him to think of Grasmere. Reading the journal, however, one sees that Grasmere was well on his mind before the eclipse occurred. Before they reached the boats that they would be traveling on when the eclipse first became noticeable, Dorothy and William were left alone on the path, Mary having gone “forward at her own pace.” Brother and sister paused in a chestnut grove that they passed as they descended towards the water and looked out over the lake. As Dorothy describes it, “Further on, continuing our delightful course, we were reminded, on looking backward, of Grasmere. A hill in shape (but only in shape) resembling Helm Crag headed the small lake. It was clothed with wood. . . . [W]e were admiring its verdant covering and elegant crown, [which was] a small white church” (249-50). Here they are looking backward, both over the terrain they have covered and to the country they have left. Much of the trip is spent similarly “looking backward” to their rural and Edenic ideal. Their view shows green woods and a lake beside an overlooking mountain, all watched over by the crown of a rural church. Wordsworth’s reading of the natural in Europe has been remarkably consistent even if fraught with anxiety. The Lake District, framed neatly by the image of a wagon wheel in his *Guide*, is packaged so that it travels well. It is no wonder that the Green Atlantic World as it has evolved in the century and a half since Wordsworth’s death continues

returning to his work to find well preserved and easily transferable images of a natural world that remain familiar.

In reading the travel narratives of both Wordsworth and Thoreau, one finds that both writers rely on consistent strategies for reading nature. Thoreau, however, is more adaptable. In the foreign environs of Maine, his eye and ear evolve over time, allowing him to read more accurately the novel flora and fauna around him. On Cape Cod, the illegibility of the land itself—its unresponsiveness to various scientific methodologies—thwarts all of his efforts to narrate it. The ocean permeates everything, and the land underfoot literally moves out from under him. At the conclusion of this narrative, he has reached Provincetown, the town at the very end of the Cape. From that point, there is only ocean in front of him and the mainland of Massachusetts, as well as the rest of his county's mainland, behind him. Provincetown also has historical significance: "It is *the* harbor of the Cape and of the fishermen of Massachusetts generally. It was known to navigators several years at least before the settlement of Plymouth" (178). The fact that Provincetown historically predates the Plymouth in this manner provides Thoreau an opportunity to engage New England and United States history from where he stands.

From Eastham to Provincetown, Thoreau has walked the length of Cape Cod and finds only that the land offers no permanent record—no mysterious bricks, no loggers' marks, and no bare fact of rock. In Provincetown, he treats this shifting land as a palimpsest: it is land he can write over to create his own foundational myth of the country. He has read dozens of historical accounts of travels to the Cape, and he realizes that the Anglophone history of the United States from Plymouth forward can be contested. Where better can he do this than from Provincetown, a location known before Plymouth and its enormous symbolic significance? He is able to rewrite both landscape and history by reading the stories of French, not English, exploration and

settlement, and in so doing, he establishes his own French ancestry as an integral part of New England history and culture.<sup>7</sup>

Thoreau begins this new history by noting that “[i]t is remarkable that there is not in English any adequate or correct account of the French exploration of what is now the coast of New England, between 1604 and 1608, though it is conceded that they then made the first permanent European settlement on the continent of North America north of St. Augustine” (179). The years Thoreau offers are over a decade earlier than the famous landing of the Pilgrims in Plymouth, and so begins Thoreau’s “Ante-Pilgrim history of New England,” a title Thoreau himself gives to Champlain’s voyages, but which serves just as well for “Provincetown,” the final chapter of *Cape Cod*, as its spelling allows Thoreau to predate established history while writing against it. Thoreau is relentless in his undermining of the meta-narrative of English priority and superiority in the settling of New England, a narrative that persists to this day. For instance:

John Smith’s map, published in 1616 . . . is by many regarded as the oldest map of New England. It is the first that was made after this country was called New England, for he so called it; but in Champlain’s “Voyages,” edition 1613 . . . there is a map of it made when it was known to Christendom as New France. (180)

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It is not generally remembered, if known, by the descendents of the Pilgrims, that when their forefathers were spending their first memorable winter in the New

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<sup>7</sup> Although there has not yet been a book-length study that considers Thoreau’s refashioning of national exploration in *Cape Cod*, a number of articles address these issues to some degree. For an investigation of Cape Cod as a work of New World exploration, see Lowney, and for Thoreau’s portrayal of the class and national divisions established in Cape Cod, see Ryan Schneider. See Talley for an account of Thoreau figuring the seashore of Cape Cod as wilderness.

World, they had for neighbors a colony of French no further off than Port Royal . . . three hundred miles distant . . . where, in spite of many vicissitudes, they had been for fifteen years. . . . The very gravestones of those Frenchmen are probably older than the oldest English monument in New England north of the Elizabeth Islands, or perhaps anywhere in New England. (182)

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While the very inhabitants of New England were thus fabling about the country a hundred miles inland, which was a *terra incognita* to them. . . Champlain . . . and others, of the preceding century . . . had already gone to war against the Iroquois in their forest forts, and penetrated to the Great Lakes and wintered there, before a Pilgrim had heard of New England. (186)

These argumentative and boastful passages give pride of place to French settlements and diminish English contribution and exploration. This “Ante-Pilgrim history” offers as counter-narrative a new way to read United States history that operates in opposition to the common narrative of New England, as well as to Thoreau’s current identity as a New England Transcendentalist and local Man of Nature.

One benefit of reading the history of New England through these previous, primarily French, explorers is that local history is effectively lengthened. In this new history, in which Thoreau’s family lineage is linked to the foundation of the country, the English Pilgrims are a secondary phenomenon. So recent are the Pilgrims, that Thoreau can posit the record of their Cape Cod explorations as just another piece of local travel writing, much like his own. The final few pages of *Cape Cod* are just this—a French Thoreauvian rewriting of the history of Cape Cod. “If America was found and lost again once, as most of us believe,” Thoreau asks, referring



to the Vikings, “then why not twice?” (196). From this question, he gives his revisionist account of the discovery of America.

Demonstrating the shrinking of time periods between the Pilgrims and himself that his new history, or anti-history, allows, he states, “quite recently, on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November, 1620 . . . the Pilgrims in the Mayflower came to anchor in Cape Cod Harbor” and began the search for habitable land. His new history, given without a date, begins when Thoreau notes that “we put up at Fuller’s Hotel, passing by the Pilgrim House as too high for us” (198; emphasis in original). After looking around a bit at this new land, Thoreau quotes that “the Pilgrims say: ‘there was the greatest store of fowl that we ever saw.’” For the anti-Pilgrim Thoreau, on the other hand, “we saw no fowl there except gulls of various kinds” (199; emphasis in original). His project is to correct Pilgrims’ records with his own: “It is remarkable that the Pilgrims (or their reporter) describe this part of the Cape, not only as well wooded, but as having a deep and excellent soil, and hardly mention the word sand. Now, what strikes the voyager is the barrenness of the land” (199). In this account, Thoreau is as much a “voyager” as the Pilgrims; his Cape Cod as legible as theirs; and his document is as much a part of the annals of exploration literature as any other, older account he is reading.

In *Cape Cod*, if anyone can be accused of misrepresenting the landscape, it is the Pilgrims, not Thoreau. In a reading of history that anticipates the work of more recent evaluations of settler documents, Thoreau offers an insightful revisionist account of how the Pilgrims might have been so repeatedly mistaken: “Their account may be true particularly, but it is generally false. They saw literally, as well as figuratively, but one side of the Cape. They naturally exaggerated the fairness and attractiveness of the land, for they were glad to get to any land at all after that anxious voyage. Everything appeared to them of the color of rose, and had

the scent of juniper and sassafras” (200). Thoreau can claim that he is reading the landscape as it is, even while admitting that his version of Cape Cod is still one of many—“if I were to live the life of mankind over again myself . . . with the universal History in my hands, I should not be able to tell what was what” (197). What matters is the land itself and the natural literacy one can make out of the features one surveys. To write his “ante-Pilgrim History,” Thoreau must read a landscape that others miss, and he was “inclined to open [his] eyes widest at the Atlantic.” He does “not care to see those features of the Cape in which it is inferior or merely equal to the mainland, but only those in which it is peculiar or superior” (203). When he stands at the back of the Cape, facing not even the “back side of the towns,” but the beach and the Atlantic, he has “put all America behind him,” literally and figuratively (215). He has made his own claim for a new, more flexible and idiosyncratic version of America. The shifting sand of the Cape is the perfect place to for him to plant his own flag, knowing as he does that the Cape will soon enough roll over it.

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This dissertation began with a hip-hop squirrel in order to interrogate some of the components of the Green Atlantic World. Some of the foundational ideology of this world can be found in the prose and poems of William Wordsworth as the nature he sees is indelibly national and historic; he historicizes English soil as he describes it. It is not so remarkable, then, to envision ways in which his texts could be—and have been—taken up for national projects that idealize a type of green space that was more myth than fact even while Wordsworth was writing of it. On the other hand, it has been Thoreau whose natural vision is often so complicated that it

is hard to pin down. The work under consideration in this chapter that comes from the latest stage of his career is “The Allegash and East Branch” from *The Maine Woods* where nature is read with as much sophistication as Thoreau can offer. He has a lifetime of experiences and thousands of pages of writing and reading behind him at this point, not to mention two previous trips to the same location. With this, he offers a sober, entertaining, and insightful narrative of the trip. It has none of the politics of some essays, none of the catchy prognostications of Walden, and none of the comic misreadings of “Ktaadn.” In the pages of “The Allegash and East Branch” there is no Green World, just a lot of green woods.

Interestingly, the work of Thoreau that today is often used for both preservation and marketing purposes comes from the pages of *The Maine Woods*. The most famous passage from that text comes, appropriately enough, from the second section, “Chesuncook,” where Thoreau finds himself on a sort of middle ground. It is his second trip to Maine, and he is beginning to find his way around this location. There are fewer misreadings, though they still do occur, and Thoreau does not need nature to signify the wilderness as much as he does in “Ktaadn.” During this second trip, Thoreau writes an extensive passage on the idea of wilderness:

The kings of England formerly had their forests “to hold the king’s game,” for sport or food, sometimes destroying villages to create or extend them; and I think that they were impelled by a true instinct. Why should not we, who have renounced the king’s authority, have our national preserves, where no villages need be destroyed, in which the bear and panther, and some even of the hunter race, may still exist, and not be “civilized off the face of the earth,”—our forests, not to hold the king’s game merely, but to hold and preserve the king himself also, the lord of creation,—not for idle sport or food, but for inspiration and our

own true recreations? Or shall we, like villains, grub them all up, poaching on our own national domains. (156)

“National preserves”: those two words have likely raised more money in the name of Thoreau for preservation purposes than any others he ever wrote in his more famous work. The quotation in its entirety is on the website of the Walden Woods Project, Don Henley’s nonprofit organization, which has been instrumental in protecting many of the acres of woodland around Walden Pond from development. They were featured in a piece in the *Sierra Club Magazine* that argued for the creation of a Maine Woods National Park and urged readers to donate to it in an article titled “Thoreau’s Dream” (Williams). And they were used in an article in the travel section of *USAToday* celebrating the opening of the “Thoreau-Wakanabi Trail” in Maine, which follows, literally, in the footsteps of Thoreau. This opening celebration featured canoe rides, “Thoreau-inspired songs,” and a Thoreau impersonator. The trail is not educational, at least not primarily. Don Hudson, the president of Maine Woods Forever, the nonprofit organization behind the trail opening is quoted in the article as saying, “I think everybody knows that the economy of the North Woods is changing. . . . Yet I think there is a role for nature-based tourism to play in the future of Maine. And I think this is a good example of how we can organize ourselves to essentially show people how wonderful this state is to travel in” (Canfield).

The passage certainly does evoke a preservationist ethic, albeit one that is a bit tongue-in-cheek (sure, throw the king in too!). However, when we look at the historical moment of that passage—coming at the end of Thoreau’s second trip to Maine during which natural literacy was more or less vexing to him the entire journey—we notice how dramatically, and with what ease, organizations such as the Walden Woods Project or Maine Woods Forever can seamlessly use Thoreau’s work for whatever their own version of “Thoreau’s Dream” might be.

What is most remarkable about the “national preserves” passage is not the part about “national preserves.” Thoreau says things like that about the importance of wilderness all the time, and most of them are famous (i.e., “I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life”; “I wish to speak a word for nature, for absolute freedom and wildness”). Rather, what is noteworthy in this case is that the larger passage does not advocate for wilderness at all. The greater point Thoreau is trying to make is one supporting what I have found to be his clearest statement, in any of his writing, of America’s rural, domestic ideal. It is not Wordsworth’s ideal, because, though they are related, Wordsworth’s green England has a more historically informed nostalgia to it; it is more rugged and less populated, and it is always in the past. In this passage, however, Thoreau finds the forests of Maine in “Chesuncook” to be overbearing in the present; he misses the signs of domesticated landscape more than he ever would have imagined on the trip to “Ktaadn” where they kept surprising him. This larger passage is quoted at length here because of its power in evoking the American ideal of the rural New England town common that was already in 1853 a powerful enough cultural symbol for Thoreau to lean on it heavily as the antidote for wilderness. As the passage progresses, it is also worth noting how much symbolic power remains in this cultural symbol of the green space of the American town; we have seen this place before:

Nevertheless, it was a relief to get back to our smooth, but still varied landscape.

For a permanent residence, it seemed to me that there could be no comparison between this and the wilderness, necessary as the latter is for a resource and a background, the raw material of all our civilization. The wilderness is simple, almost to barrenness. The partially cultivated country it is which chiefly has inspired, and will continue to inspire, the strains of poets, such as compose the

mass of any literature. Our woods are sylvan, and their inhabitants woodmen and rustics. . . . Perhaps our own woods and fields,—in the best wooded towns, where we need not quarrel about the huckleberries,—with the primitive swamps scattered here and there in their midst, but not prevailing over them, are the perfection of parks and groves, gardens, arbors, paths, vistas, and landscapes. They are the natural consequence of what art and refinement we as a people have,—the common which each village possesses, its true paradise, in comparison with which all elaborately and willfully wealth-constructed parks and gardens are paltry imitations. . . . The poet's, commonly, is not a logger's path, but a woodman's. The logger and pioneer have preceded him, like John the Baptist; eaten the wild honey, it may be, but the locusts also; banished decaying wood and the spongy mosses which feed on it, and built hearths and humanized Nature for him. (155-56)

It is from here that Thoreau reminds himself of the necessity of wilderness, noting that “national preserves” might be useful for occasional grounding. Parks, groves, gardens, paths, and landscape are all constructed places, and for Thoreau they are the ideal in this passage. We continue to privilege these green places and do not have to travel to Concord or Grasmere to find them; we can see them from any computer as we watch MC Nuts dancing along them. The partly cultivated country, the village common, the sylvan woods—these are all humanized nature. Or, to choose features of Wordsworth's ideal: free cattle, a lake, and green hills, inspired by English liberty and godliness. Today in the Green Atlantic World, it is no longer just the timber from Maine, or Oregon, or Brazil that is “raw material.” Nor do individuals need to map or walk the Lake District to establish contact with England's green history. Yet, the image of the

rural, domestic ideal remains culturally significant. The packaging of it—for motives of protection or profit—often relies on a perception of the natural world that, for their careers, William Wordsworth and Henry David Thoreau struggled with.

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Last month, I received a letter in the mail featuring a picture of a home that would not be out of place in a figuration of the Green Atlantic World. The letter was printed on green paper, and the home it pictured looked to be an old farmhouse, perhaps undergoing some repair. In the foreground of the picture, there was a green lawn, strewn with leaves, and the white farmhouse was shaded by an oak tree. The letter informed me that the house was the birthplace of Henry David Thoreau. It was being restored, and a nonprofit organization had been established to fund the endeavor—The Thoreau Farm Trust.

I received the letter because the organization needs money, and, as a member of The Thoreau Society, I am a likely target. However, I also noticed that this new organization and its fundraising apparatus obscure and simplify questions of Thoreau's relationship to a Green World that this dissertation has been working to historicize and explicate. Although the Thoreau Farm Trust only exists, so the letter explains, for "preserving the birthplace of Henry David Thoreau," this organization does not frame its message only in these terms. There is a lot going on in this letter. The "Honorary Chair" of The Thoreau Farm Trust is Robert Pinsky, and its "Honorary Directors" are Lawrence Buell and Bill McKibben. These names are featured prominently at the top of the letter as a way for the organization to show its credibility. But to whom is it trying to seem credible? People like me, I suppose, who know the names of the star players in the

overlapping discourses of literary culture, ecocriticism, and environmentalism. However, the names, and attendant reputations, of Pinsky, Buell, and McKibben, when used together for fundraising, raise the same questions that MC Nuts and his Wordsworth rap display: questions about the relationships between advertising and academia, between environmental literary study and environmental activism, and above all else, questions about how an author might become used as a type of environmental currency.

Reading the letter, I found that the Thoreau Farm Trust has larger designs than a restoration of the building. The trust is working to make a building that will “not be a historic relic or museum, but a vibrant place for people to visit and to explore how Thoreau’s ideas live on in the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (McJennett). Specifically, the trust is requesting money to “incorporate[e] green materials and technologies into the restoration wherever possible.” The brochure details these materials and technologies: “Clivus Multrum composting toilets,” a “[l]ow temperature heat pump that does not require the use of fossil fuels for heating and cooling,” and “solar photovoltaic panels.” These “materials and technologies” are not just being used because they are environmentally responsible nor because they make long-term financial sense. The trust is very clear to state that their “approach is appropriate to the site that is the birthplace of the father of the environmental movement.” Further, and more astonishingly, the trust is “eager to share Thoreau’s ideas on sustainability and how these environmentally friendly elements can be replicated in any home or office” (McJennett). In the same way that popular, activist, and academic interests are conflated in featuring Pinsky, Buell, and McKibben on their letterhead, the trust also conflates the reputation of Thoreau with modern, environmentally friendly technology. One will soon be able to go to Thoreau’s birthplace to learn how to make a “home or office” more sustainable. The cultural and literary significance of Thoreau’s home and its



place in Concord's history is obscured in order to have Thoreau serve as a mouthpiece for twenty-first-century eco-products.

In the case of MC Nuts, the National Trust fused Wordsworth, as the exemplar of Green English ideals, to hip-hop culture in order to encourage tourists to come to the Lake District; on the other hand, the Thoreau Farm Trust encourages me to donate money (for a cause I happen to support) because the “father of the environmental movement” would be in favor of composting toilets and solar power (an idea I do not). Wordsworth and Thoreau remain powerful figures in the intersections of conservation, literary criticism, and tourism. These intersections are also treacherous places if one wants to think clearly about the actual work done by these writers. I do believe Wordsworth and Thoreau remain relevant today, especially as countries and cultures around the globe are forced to reconsider their relationship to nature and their use of natural resources. The various practices that Wordsworth and Thoreau brought to their understanding of nature—aesthetic theories, cartography, natural history, guidebook writing, and travel narratives—helped them to see the natural world in a number of different—and at times competing—ways. Studying them, one appreciates that, though their work continues to resonate today, the products of the Green Atlantic World were already packaged for a sort of national commerce well before Thoreau and Wordsworth ever came to them. At times, Wordsworth and Thoreau participated in these well established discourses in ways that are not unfamiliar to modern conservationists—Wordsworth's emphasis on planting only native species in the Lake District, or Thoreau's careful attention to the natural re-growth of forest trees. On the other hand, both also show a tendency to trade on images of nature to further other projects they found more pertinent. When Thoreau uses the idea of “wildness” to praise the westward expansion of the United States or to celebrate individual action, or when Wordsworth maps the Lake District

to create a static and nostalgic version of England's rural and godly past, they are using familiar tropes of packaged ideas about nature with the same fluency one finds in the rhymes of MC Nuts or the promotional material of the Walden Woods Project. Studying Wordsworth and Thoreau together makes more visible the scaffolding behind the Green Atlantic World and illuminates the power the rhetoric of this world has to shape ideas of the natural both historically and today.

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