REORDERING NATURE: ROMANTIC SCIENCE, NATURAL HISTORY, AND MOUNTAINEERING

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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In the modern outdoor recreation community (and the $887 billion annually U.S. outdoor industry), there is the concern that outdoor recreationists are "loving our [crags, trails, rivers, summits] to death." At the same time, conservation-minded outdoor recreation organizations such as the Access Fund, a non-profit dedicated to protecting outdoor climbing spaces in the U.S., see outdoor recreation as an essential element of wilderness conservation. Looking to late eighteenth and early nineteenth century natural history and travel narratives, this dissertation addresses the questions of what landscapes came to matter and why in early American environmentalism. How did natural history writing and artistic expression influence the early preservation movement? How did the practice of outdoor recreation become perceived as a moral act? And how did early forms of outdoor recreation arise from intertwined practices of natural history and aesthetic appreciation?

This dissertation examines the various entangled fields of natural history, science, travel writing and environmental aesthetics, spanning the time period from the dawn of the "age of wonder" to the rise of the early environmental conservation movement. John James Audubon's great work of natural history and art, the *Birds of America* and the accompanying *Ornithological Biographies*, depict the entanglement of science and art,

which deeply informs the Audubon Society's approach to conservation. Frederick Law Olmsted's southern travel narratives and John Muir's *Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* also contributed to the architecture of environmental aesthetics at the early stages of the American conservation movement. Muir and Olmsted's discomfort with slavery and with the appearance of both farms, swamps, and forests in the South strongly influenced their later ideas about how Americans ought to enjoy and benefit from parks and recreation. The influence of mountaineering writing on environmentalism did not begin with Muir, but had already developed important aesthetic patterns in eighteenth-century Europe. As mountaineers wandered the high places of the earth amid changing scientific and aesthetic perceptions of wild landscapes, the growth of natural history and the ascendency of the sublime aesthetic, their writing reflected the intertwined and interdependent nature of science and art in the Romantic period.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In a brief yet delightful essay for the *New York Times Review of Books* in 1952, novelist and amateur lepidopterist Vladimir Nabokov pondered the merit of John James Audubon's drawing of butterflies, a category of animal life that Audubon, Nabokov judges, apparently knew little about. "Anyone knowing as little about butterflies as I do about birds may find Audubon's lepidoptera as attractive as his bright, active, theatrical birds are to me," Nabokov admits. But Audubon's insect drawings, Nabokov claims, all show the marks of a "naïve artist," whose representations "burlesque" the specimens they're meant to accurately convey. In the end, Nabokov ponders: "Can anyone draw something he knows nothing about? Does there not exist a high ridge where the mountainside of 'scientific' knowledge joins the opposite slope of 'artistic' imagination? If so, Audubon the butterfly artist is at sea level on one side and climbing the wrong foothill on the other." Nabokov's metaphor of the creative (illustrator, writer, artist) attempting to reach the ridge of the mountain that joins artistic expression and carefully rendered, "scientific" detail has always struck me as a fitting analogy for the practice of natural history in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Rendered as separate figures, one an artist and the other a naturalist, the two Audubons are both lost somewhere between the summit and the seas, one wandering up the wrong mountain, the other firmly planted at zero-altitude, without a map, a compass, or a seeming desire to try and find his way out. Though Nabokov's mountain of ideal representation has two faces—one imaginative, perhaps subjective and emotional, and the other rational,

objective, and scientific—together they merge at the ridgeline of the ultimate, beautiful, and truthful expression of the thing itself.

While a naturalist himself, Nabokov was not a climber. Yet he employs a familiar metaphor—using the challenge of mountaineering to describe a rhetorical challenge.[1] By the mid-twentieth century, the international fervor for summiting the world's highest peaks had reached new levels of intensity, as European, American, Japanese, and other national mountaineering teams raced to become the first to reach unclimbed summits in the Himalaya. In 1951 a British reconnaissance expedition heavily staffed with Sherpa guides determined the path to the top of Chomolungma (Mt. Everest), the apex of the world. At the time of Nabokov's writing, two Swiss expeditions attempted to reach the summit, and rumors circulated that a team from the Soviet Union had also launched an attempt.[2] To stand on the summit was a symbol of authority: as Bernard Debarbieux and Gilles Rudaz write in *The Mountain: A Political History from the Enlightenment to the Present*, "For a long time the ascent of peaks was understood and presented as a component of political appropriation. […] Mountain climbing thus functioned as a metaphor (an athletic conquest stood in for a legal one) and as a metonymy (the conquest of a summit stood in for that of an entire region) for territorial appropriation itself" (69). At the same time, mountaineering was also used as a metaphor to elevate the moral and

[1] The history of the metaphor that describes a cultural, moral or rhetorical challenge using a mountaineering challenge would be an interesting study against the backdrop of the rise in prestige of climbing as a leisure activity across Europe and the US in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Langston Hughes uses this metaphor to great effect in his essay, "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain" (1926). Just over a decade earlier, the American mountaineer Fanny Bullock Workman stood at 21,000 feet (breaking the altitude record for women) as she brandished a newspaper with the bolded headline, "Votes for Women."

[2] Sherpa climber Tenzing Norgay and New Zealander Edmund Hillary reached the summit of Chomolungma in 1953, though English papers announced that it was "British" climbers who had "conquered" the peak.

intellectual status of those who "go higher" and "reach summits" to "stand above," "look down upon" and "see farther" than their counterparts. Mountaineering narratives, such as those by Edward Whymper and Eric Shipton,[3] depicted the precarious nature of climbing over vertical rock and ice, as well as the physical fitness and mental fortitude that climbing demanded. Hence the practice of mountaineering, with its required physical discipline and mental perseverance, also began to be perceived as a moral act.

To return briefly to the butterflies: Nabokov's hopelessly wandering Audubons are far from achieving the "summit" of illustration of the real butterfly. Though Nabokov deployed mountaineering challenge as a metaphor, the history of mountaineering has much more to do with scientific knowledge and artistic expression and aesthetics than the novelist perhaps realized. And while John James Audubon was also not a climber himself, his ornithological and artistic work, the *Birds of America*, is a fitting point to begin a study of the entanglements of science, art, travel and the environment.

Since the late nineteenth century, Audubon has also been a touchstone figure for conservation in the United States. While the website of the national conservation organization that bears his name does not reference John James in the official "History" webpage of their organization, Audubon's images of birds and descriptions of the backcountry woods are part of the long story of the link between science, art, and environmentalism. The work of illustrating and describing nature and narrating travels has had an important role in the shaping of nature writing and conservation, and

[3] Whymper's account of the climb of the Matterhorn, in which four members of the expedition fell to their death after making the first ascent, *Scrambles Amongst the Alps*, is generally regarded as one of the foundational classics of mountaineering literature.

influencing the growth of outdoor recreation and pursuits like mountaineering, particularly in the U.S.

This dissertation examines the various entangled fields of natural history, science, travel writing and environmental aesthetics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Over the course of three separate articles, this dissertation addresses or indirectly references the questions of what landscapes came to matter and why in early American environmentalism. How did natural history writing and artistic expression influence the early preservation movement? How did the practice of outdoor recreation become perceived as a moral act? And how did early forms of outdoor recreation arise from intertwined practices of natural history and aesthetic appreciation?

In the modern outdoor recreation community (and the $887 billion annually U.S. outdoor industry),[4] there is the concern that outdoor recreationists are "loving our [crags, trails, rivers, summits] to death." At the same time, conservation-minded organizations such as the Access Fund, a non-profit dedicated to protecting outdoor climbing spaces in the U.S., sees outdoor recreation as an essential element of wilderness conservation. As the former Access Fund Executive Director Brady Robinson said in an interview with *Alpinist* magazine in 2017: "As climbers have more and more contact with wild places [...] the more visceral and intense their experience is, the more likely they are to dedicate their time, and lives, to protect these places."[5] Researchers have attempted to answer the question of whether outdoor recreation really does convert participants into activists since the 1970s, when, as Ethan Linck reports for *High Country News*, sociologists Riley

[4] This figure is according to the 2019 report from the Outdoor Industry Association.

[5] See Wright, "Refuge."

Dunlap and Robert Heffernan demonstrated that "outdoor recreation was only weakly correlated with environmental concern, and even this depended on the type of recreation and the particular environmental problem."[6] Subsequent studies have produced similar results.[7] Of course, one need not literally glimpse an endangered wolf through a spotting scope at Yellowstone National Park or tread past the delicate, natural sandcastles of cryptobiotic soil of the Utah desert to become an advocate for the protection of the greater Yellowstone Ecosystem or the environment of the Desert Southwest. Adventure writer Tim Cahill, one of the founding editors of *Outside Magazine*, once declared that he thought exploration narratives themselves could "enlist readers into a gentle conspiracy of caring," in other words, that carefully written and lustrously detailed narratives could themselves prompt readers to grow an attachment to the places, flora, and fauna they read about, and, in turn, to motivate them to act on their behalf.[8] The articles in this project attempt to address a few places in U.S. literature where such forms of aesthetically and scientifically informed knowledge and the practice of conservation meet.

The work in this dissertation examines texts at the intersection of natural history, travel writing, science, and aesthetics, and roughly spans the time period from the dawn of the "age of wonder"—a term that historian Richard Holmes has used to refer to the period of the second scientific revolution—to the rise of the early environmental preservation movement. The three distinct, chapter-length articles in this dissertation are loosely connected and are all informed by the question of how the legacies of late-

[6] See Linck for further details about studies from 1970-2009.

[7] A 2009 study in the Journal of Experiential Education noted, "Whether a person recreates in the outdoors does not alone predict his or her environmental attitudes." qtd. in Linck.

[8] Thanks to Katie Ives for making me aware of this quote. Qtd in Richards, 34.

eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers who were preoccupied by nature and landscapes continue to influence the culture and climate of modern-day environmental appreciation, recreation, and conservation.

The first article in this study looks at the artistic and material legacy of the work of John James Audubon. Though today the Audubon society, an avian and habitat conservation organization, has distanced itself from its namesake, the legacy of Audubon appears in the common practice of the birders list common to birdwatchers. I suggest that Audubon's great work of natural history and art, the *Birds of America* and the accompanying *Ornithological Biographies*, comprise a necessary, first step in the development of the concept of the "life list" for bird watchers by making an image of a bird a commodity in place of the body of the (dead) bird itself. The founders of the Audubon Society wanted to put a stop to the practice of killing wild birds to collect feathers used in hats, dresses, and other fashionable garments.

The second article considers how the antebellum travel narratives of Frederick Law Olmsted through the "Cotton Kingdom" and the post-Civil War journal of John Muir's *Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf* contribute to the architecture of environmental aesthetics at the early stages of the American conservation movement. Following their Southern travels, both writers eventually visit the valley of the Yosemite, in which they find the culmination of picturesque scenes and write in earnest for their preservation. Muir and Olmsted's discomfort with slavery and with the appearance of both farms, swamps, and forests in the South strongly influenced their later ideas about how Americans ought to enjoy and benefit from parks and recreation.

The third article looks at both the travel and natural history narratives of mountain climbers on both sides of the Atlantic, from the onset of the Age of Wonder to the end of the period associated with Romanticism. This article demonstrates how the seeming paradoxes at the heart of much of mountaineering literature can be traced back to the beginning of the pursuit of wandering the high places of the earth. I demonstrate how, amid changing perceptions of wild landscapes, the growth of natural history and the ascendency of the sublime aesthetic in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, mountain environments attracted climbers to survey new lands on the boundaries of multiple frontiers.

Audubon and Muir both inspired major U.S. conservation organizations: the Audubon Society and the Sierra Club.[9] Relatedly, the influence of mountaineering writing on environmentalism did not begin with Muir, but had already developed important aesthetic patterns in eighteenth-century Europe. Beginning in the 1850s, Frederick Law Olmsted designed large outdoor parks in attempts to bring the benefits of nature to the urban residents of many U.S. cities. Hence each article considers landscapes and symbols of nature that have had a powerful, lasting impact on the environmental and conservation movement in the US: from the gorgeously detailed, gold-leafed and yet "ornithologically exact" avian illustrations of ornithologist and hunter Audubon;[10] to the marshy lowlands of the Carolinas, Georgia and Florida visited by Muir and Olmsted, locales once feared by whites that also served as refuges for escaped slaves in the

[9] (Of course, ornithology and the conservation of bird species did not begin with Audubon. Alexander Wilson, the Scots emigrant to America, appears in his writings as in some ways a more sympathetic conservation hero than Audubon.) In addition to the U.S. conservation organization listed above, a British environmental group the John Muir Trust takes its name from the Scottish/American conservationist.

[10] See Irmscher, 189.

antebellum South; to the pathways and park benches of Central Park, a work of social as much as landscape engineering; to the glimmering granite that towers above the grassy plain of the iconic Yosemite Valley; to the views from the "summit position" across the Alps that influenced a culture of Romantic science and mountaineering across the Atlantic.[11] These objects and landscapes, as they show up in natural history and travel narratives, evince the larger shifts in ideologies of the environment and aesthetics across the nineteenth century.

The natural history narrative describes, catalogs, quantifies and engages with the materials of the natural world—such as, pigeon eggs, snake skins, granite seams, magnolia trees, mountain valleys, fossils, wood rot, snail shells, basalt columns, ravens, pebbles, algae blooms—all things that pass through the narrator's field of vision, via binoculars or a hand lens, or are simply seen in the crisp air atop a summit, poignantly saturated with Romantic, golden light. Often these narratives are written from the perspective of middle- to upper-class educated European-Americans who, in cataloguing their observations, travel into parts unmapped or under-explored and then report back to centers of imperial or colonial power. Mary Louise Pratt's *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* makes the case that the seemingly objective and impersonal naturalists working under the Linnaean system of species identification and classification at the mid-to-late eighteenth century acted as executors of imperial order and power in the peripheries of empire. As Susan Scott Parrish remarks, the rise of natural history in the eighteenth century was "fueled by the European nations' competitive drive to exploit, collect, catalog, and understand the material richness of the Americas, both American

[11] I borrow the term "summit position" from Hansen. See esp. pages 15-17 and the discussion of Saussure in 58-60.

nature and the hybrid types of knowledge forged in the colonies" (6). Parrish's own work, *American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* suggests that the transfer of knowledge from the periphery to the center is not as unidirectional as Pratt's *Imperial Eyes* argues; rather, Parish writes, "because America was a great material curiosity for the Old World and its immigrants to the New, America's unique matrix of contested knowledge making—its polycentric curiosity—was crucially formative of modern European ways of knowing" (7). This dissertation is invested in the origins and consequences of curiosities that preoccupied nature and travel writers, and how writers borrowed tools from both science and art to probe into the unknown.

As several studies have documented, the dividing line of "science" and "art" was blurry, if nonexistent, in the writings of many natural historians of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Several studies document changes to ideas about nature in natural history writing through the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth century.[12] As William B. Ashworth, Jr. suggested, early natural history texts function emblematically through their portrayal of an "entire web of associations that inextricably links human culture and the animal world" (35). In their work on *Objectivity*, Daston and Galison trace the lineage of a gradual epistemological shift in natural history observations from the Age of Enlightenment to today. The earliest forms of objectivity, embodied in Enlightenment classification, beginning with the "truth-to-nature" model which rendered natural history specimens as idealized types. Audubon, for example, portrayed each

[12] Examples include Christoph Irmscher, *The Poetics of Natural History*, Susan Scott Parrish, *American Curiosity*, and Christopher Iannini, *Fatal Revolutions*. Iannini suggests the term "world of letters" as opposed to "literature" to indicate the varying commitment to aesthetics of the natural history documents that these kinds of academic studies analyze (4 fn.4).

species of a bird as a character with visible structural features that he painted and described, as well as behavior that he observed in the field and tried to capture in both his writing and drawing. For Alexander von Humboldt, the aid of instruments was needed to better classify the elements of the earth, but he still used a general, characteristic look to render each biographical zone in his *Naturgemälde* illustrations.[13] By the mid-nineteenth century, Daston and Galison suggest, the science of natural history saw the growth of an epistemic virtue of mechanical objectivity.[14]

In natural history writing, this epistemological shift played out in the rising professionalization of science and the simultaneously increasing interest in popular natural history. In the era of Romantic science, roughly given as 1770-1830, Romantic explorers such as Bartram and Humboldt catalogued nature as they made effusive descriptions of the beauties they encountered in their travels. Following the end of this era, the disciplines of modern science began to specialize and differentiate, and at the same time art and literature became perceived as incompatible with science. In part this was a consequence of more instruments and measurements and laboratories. But there were still scientific authors with widespread appeal, such as Louis Agassiz, who was among the first to popularize theories of the ice ages and the formation of glaciers.

In the mid-nineteenth century, experiential-focused narratives such as Susan Fennimore Cooper's *Rural Hours* and Thoreau's *Walden* followed in the pastoral

[13] Andrea Wulf explains, "*Naturgemälde* is "an untranslatable German term that can mean a 'painting of nature' but which also implies a sense of unity or wholeness. […] As Humboldt later explained, a 'microcosm on one page'" (88).

[14] See Daston and Galison, esp. 115-121. Daston and Galison posit the term "mechanical objectivity" to differentiate major developments in the history of objectivity, beginning with the "truth-to-nature" model, shifting to the mechanical model in the mid-nineteenth century, and developing to "trained judgment" in the early twentieth century (17-53, also 241).

tradition, loosely defined, as Lawrence Buell writes in "American Pastoral Ideology Reappraised," as "being preoccupied with nature and rurality as setting and theme, and value in contradistinction from society and the urban" (1). Such texts followed in the tradition of natural history writing by observing species and changes in the seasons in moments of idyllic retreat into nature. Traditionally understood, as Leo Marx describes in *The Machine in the Garden*, the pastoral renders a way for readers to flee to an imaginary, idyllic landscape. Nineteenth-century nature writers emphasized the promise of solitary retreat or escape from the ills of modern society and industrialization into the wilderness. Don Scheese writes in *Nature Writing: The Pastoral Impulse in America* (1995) that the work of the American pastoralism "presents the fullest, most compelling version" of the pastoral tradition (5). In its attempts to resolve the conflicts between a number of polarized concepts, such as civilization and wilderness, Scheese argues, "pastoral writers are antimodernist who employ the pastoral to tell of their 'escape to' […] a particular place in order to celebrate a return to a simpler, more harmonious way of life 'closer to nature'" (6). But as William Cronon explains in his essay, "The Trouble with Wilderness," the wilderness in American culture has been mythically constructed as a pure, pristine space—the simplest form of pastoral—divorced from human influence. This conception, he writes, "represents the false hope of an escape from responsibility":

> The dream of an unworked natural landscape is very much the fantasy of people who have never themselves had to work the land to make a living…. Only people whose relation to the land was already alienated could hold up wilderness as a model for human life in nature, for the

> romantic ideology of wilderness leaves precisely nowhere for human beings actually to make their living from the land. (70)

A simple romantic ideology, Cronon observes, can have harmful consequences, not only for the environment, but for the people who stewarded these lands for generations before the popular environmental movement began. As the U.S. government removed Indigenous inhabitants from landscapes such as Yosemite Valley, the forests and valleys of the national parks emerged as symbols of a mythological wilderness in which nature was separate from the influence or history of people. From urban parks a la Olmsted to the infant national parks system, retreats to the green spaces promised physical and spiritual renewal. Transformed from the Puritan's warning that "beneath the florid plenty of the New world […] the Devil is lurking in the wilderness," white Americans began to experience a sea change in attitudes toward the backcountry.[15] David Mazel writes in *American Literary Environmentalism*, nature only seems natural because it is constituted as such through discourse and institutions such as the National Park Service (1). As Glen Love suggested in his article "Pastoral Theory meets Ecocriticism," in American literature the wilderness began to replace the bucolic shepherd's pastoral settings of Europe. Thoreau prescribed the "tonic of wildness," and Muir's *My First Summer in the Sierra* added kindling to some Americans' desire to experience wilderness places as "Nature's cathedrals"—the dwellings of God on earth.[16] Muir was in many ways a neo-puritan who went into the wilderness like a biblical hermit and emerged purified and inspired with prophetic messages for the American people. He gained credibility and authority in part by his suffering (cold, stormy weather, loneliness, lack of food, long

[15] "Beneath the florid plenty," from Peter N. Carroll, qtd. in Mogen et. al., 20.

[16] See Muir, "My First Summer in the Sierra," 238.

marches and climbs, threats from animals, etc.) But then he told the middle and upper classes of the era of the Robber Barons that such expeditions into the wild would be fun, not suffering. By the late-nineteenth century, "wilderness," as opposed to a shepherd's rural retreat, had become a recognized pastoral landscape.

But the pastoral also holds the potential for "radicalism," as Buell demonstrates. In a famous passage from Thoreau's "Slavery in Massachusetts," Buell reads a moment of pastoral retreat, symbolized by a white lily flower that Thoreau encounters on a walk, as both "an agent of escape on the narrative level," as well as a "rhetorica[l] […] bomb thrown at the state" ("Pastoral Reappraised" 10). The pastoral can be "a serious and complex criticism of life," Love writes (195). The pastoral form "take[s] on heretofore unprecedented significance at a time when the comfortably mythopoeic green world of pastoral is beset by profound treats of pollution, despoliation, and diminishment" (196). Like the pastoral's reaction against industrialization, Love suggests, ecocriticism can respond to the precariousness of the modern world.

Doing so requires recognizing the imbrication of humans in the natural world. As Buell suggests in *The Environmental Imagination*, the focus of study from the category of *nature* to that of *environment* acknowledges how human understanding of nature shapes our perceptions of us, such that landscapes become saturated with ideology. Relatedly, American eco-criticism has expanded its scope since the first wave beyond the familiar canon of pastoral nature writers to include early American travel narratives, botanical journals, and natural history writing. Michael Branch's anthology *Reading the Roots: American Nature Writing before* Walden (2004), Branch questions the assumptions of the genre of nature writing as it had been constrained to "literary" and in the "speculative

personal voice" (xvi). Nature writing, Branch observes, "tends to be modern or even ecological in its sensibility, and is often in service to an implicit or explication preservationist agenda." While Branch offers an important corrective to the formerly limited time frame of nature writing, his anthology, which includes dozens of excerpts from 17th and 18th century writings about American nature, also tends to emphasize wilderness as the location of "place-based literature" in the nature writing canon (xvii). More recently, eco-critics have been engaging engage placed-based literatures that dwell in city spaces, agricultural zones, industrial areas, or even "toxic" environments, reframing the conception of "nature" as something that is always other, out there and separate from humans, to something that humans are imbricated within and with.[17] In his more recent monograph *Writing for an Endangered World*, Buell expanded the scope of his concept of the "environmental imagination" to demonstrate how humans and nonhumans are entangled in dynamic networks: to recognize "the indispensableness of physical environment as a shaping force in human art and experience" (9).

Writers of mountaineering literature have long offered versions of the environment as a "shaping force" in their lives. From Muir's familiar phrase "The mountains are calling and I must go," to today, examples of the powerful allure of mountain summits abound in contemporary climbing writing. In his autobiography *The Calling: A Life Rocked by Mountains* (2014), Metis alpinist Barry Blanchard describes hearing the "call" of the mountains at a young age. In an April 2019 post to Instagram, mountaineer Conrad Anker invoked the trope as part of formulating his condolences on the news that three young alpinists had perished in the Canadian Rockies days before:

[17] A review of the last five years of issues of ISLE, the journal of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, reveals many articles with these environments as their focus.

"We choose to play by the rules of the mountains because they are our calling. We accept the loss that strikes unaware in return for the bonds of friendship created by experience life in the majesty of nature. The intensity of the high alpine, guarded by wind & snow and ruled by gravity, is where we find these moments that define us as people." It is an attempt to explain why alpinists venture into high-risk zones. Sociologist Richard Mitchell cautions against this line of reasoning in *Mountain Experience: The Psychology and Sociology of Adventure*, by suggesting that the force most shaping our experience is ourselves: "If, in climbing [mountains], we feel and become more than was possible before, let us not forget whom to praise. It is not the stones that makes us happy. Whatever we find in the mountains we took there in the first place" (225).[18]

Somewhere between these two positions is another knife-edge ridge, like the mountain of Nabokov's metaphor. Americans today tend to see science as essential to the proper functioning of environmental policy and regulation in the U.S., and yet many look to artists, poets, and writers like Audubon, Thoreau, and Muir as prophetic founders of the conservation movement in their country. In addition to the ridgeline between science and art, many of the texts I examine in this dissertation construct an arête between work and play, between challenge and enjoyment, suffering and pleasure, and try to promote a vision for how conservation or knowledge of nature should balance the two. Science and art have been linked even in the work of these figures, even as they demonstrate how aesthetic edification and intellectual argument form just a few of the mountain's faces.

[18] In *Landscapes of the Sacred* Belden Lane suggests, "Landscape is first of all an effort of the imagination—a constructed way of seeing the world which is distinctive to a people, their culture, and even their anticipated means of encountering the holy…. Landscape is never simply something 'out there'— The very choice and farming of the scene is itself a construction of the imagination" (131).

CHAPTER II

"DRAWN FROM NATURE": PARADOXES OF CONSERVATION AND COMMODIFICATION IN THE WORK OF JOHN JAMES AUDUBON

Sweet is the lore which Nature brings;

Our meddling intellect

Mis-shapes the beauteous forms of things:

We murder to dissect.

—William Wordsworth, "The Tables Turned," 1798

In October of 2015, field biologist Christopher Filardi unexpectedly found himself at the center of a national controversy. Working for the American Museum of Natural History, Filardi and his research team had just returned from the remote Solomon Islands, where they had captured the first photograph of a male moustached kingfisher and then collected (a gentle euphemism for euthanized) the specimen for further study. In an interview with the Audubon Society, Filardi said that finding the bird was like encountering a "magnificent…ghost," and that the experience evoked in him a "surreal, childlike sense of a mythical beast come to life." Though Filardi explained that collecting the male specimen was necessary for the species' conservation, outrage quickly followed the news of the bird's death. Avian advocates launched a Change.org petition, calling for the museum to "Stop Killing in the Name of Science."

In an article posted to the Audubon society website, "Why I collected a Moustached Kingfisher," Filardi defended his decision to collect the specimen, arguing that the killing was necessary for the advancement of ornithological knowledge. Denying that his action would harm the kingfisher population's chances for success, Filardi

identified the habitat degradation and climate change—the incremental shifts that Robert Nixon has termed "slow violence"—as the real threats to the future of the species, not the spectacular event of the death of a single specimen (2). Furthermore, he argued, any population to which the loss of one individual harms the chance of survival is doomed already. But in response to his attempts at defense and explanation, public anger increased. Filardi was labeled a murderer and received threats against his life. Amid the imbroglio, he left his post at the museum out of concern for both his safety and the well-being of the institution.

Today, field biologists still debate what data samples best capture the individual qualities necessary of a voucher, that is, a unique, specimen (Rocha et. al. 814). Filardi's decision to collect the kingfisher and prepare it as a scientific specimen seems antiquated to those imagining the dimly lit dioramas of natural history museums and curiosity cabinets of old. But to the working field biologist, specimen collection is the best way to both preserve the unique qualities of a rare bird like the kingfisher, and to provide the most reliable material for molecular, toxicology, morphology, and plumage studies. In his defense, Filardi argued that sample techniques that would allow the bird to live—such as taking blood samples, collecting individual feathers, or capturing photographs—simply do not provide sufficient detail. Finding out more about the life of the kingfisher necessitated its death.

As kingfisher controversy illustrates, in our modern notions of endangered species and wilderness, collecting specimens hastens not only the loss of wilderness but also the destruction of those species. But two hundred years ago, in the time of the naturalist and artist John James Audubon, the bounty of the American frontier seemed limitless. The

sense of the abundance of birds meant that death was not regarded as the opposite of living, and that static possession wasn't opposed to dynamic, living life. The representation of life, cast in a painting of a bird, therefore, could seem more life-like than the body of a bird itself.

Modern bird watching has made a fetish of possession around bird sightings, rather than individual specimens, as geographer Nathan Sayre explains in his book *Ranching, Endangered Species, and Urbanization in the Southwest: Species of Capital*. In the culture of modern-day bird watching, Sayre notes,

> Each sighting occurs between a particular viewer and a particular bird at a particular time and place, yet it rises to the level of the universal system of taxonomy, becoming a timeless, impartial apprehension of Nature legitimated by the secular truth-value of science. Every birder's sightings are at once individually meaningful and universally comparable. (210)

Even in the Audubon's Society's popular winter event, the Christmas Bird Count, Sayre observes, "the verb 'to get' was frequently used with a bird species as the direct object," a grammatical slip that transforms a singular moment of a sighting into a possession.

In this chapter, I suggest that, with the publication of *Birds of America* and *Ornithological Biographies*, Audubon succeeded in bringing about a necessary, prior stage in the evolution of that fetish by making the picture of the bird a commodity in place of the body of the (dead) bird itself. Acknowledging this step is essential for understating the origins of the first Audubon societies and perspectives toward hunting and nature photography at the end of the nineteenth century. Today, many people familiar with Audubon's prolific hunting career question the appropriateness of associating his

name with a conservation organization. Yet in this chapter, I will demonstrate that the transposition of value from the specimen to the image, which Audubon helped to bring about, corresponded with the principles of early avian conservation societies and have had a lasting impact on the outdoor recreation economy and conservation movements of the moment.

The Paradoxes of John James Audubon

The apparent paradox at the heart of the kingfisher controversy—that of killing in order to preserve—has a long history in the field of American ornithology. Such irony was not, however, lost on Audubon. As several readers have noted, Audubon's work as an ornithologist entailed negotiating competing desires: to preserve the mystical effect of encountering wondrous, wild nature on the one hand, and to possess and control it on the other. Readers of Audubon generally fixate on this central paradox: that the steps necessary to chronicling the beauty of the birds (which many of his readers take as a stand-in for nature or wilderness more generally) entailed so much loss and death.

Readers of Audubon have continued to note the many paradoxes in his work. In his introduction to the *Audubon Reader* (1989), Scott Russell Sanders proposes that Audubon's literary persona is "delicately balanced among four rival identities": the hunter, artist, scientist and nature lover. "What makes Audubon extraordinary, and what charges these writing with inner drama…is the *fusing* of these roles, the fierce interplay of identities," he suggests. But as Chris Beyers rightly points out in his essay, "The Ornithological Autobiography of John James Audubon," these identities contrast (or are left unresolved in the text) as often as they "fuse" or overlap. Christopher Irmscher's study on the poetics of natural history notes that Audubon's bird biographies depict a

narrator troubled by the split between his subjective, artistic, feeling self and his empirical, objective, scientific self. Alternately the "murderer" and "protector" of birds, Irmscher's Audubon is both "ardent admirer as well as… inveterate destroyer" (214). Christopher Iannini heightens the critique of such specimen waste, casting *Birds of America* as a work of "extravagant violence" (255).

In what is perhaps the first introduction of Audubon to American literary criticism, Roderick Nash describes this paradox in *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967). Nash situates Audubon alongside painter Thomas Cole and novelist James Fennimore Cooper as figures who established the foundation of American wilderness thought. These figures, he writes, illustrate that the "appreciation of wilderness led easily to sadness at its disappearance from the American scene" (96). Nash notes that the artistic project of *Birds of America* "calls attention to natural beauty" of the landscape at the same time that Audubon observes the "destruction of the forest" in the *Ornithological Biographies*. According to Nash, the central paradox lies in the fact that Audubon, observing the destruction of the forest, didn't oppose or condemn it. Nash's textual analysis of Audubon is short. He focuses solely on one of sixty episodes that comprise the 1926 edited volume, *Delineations of American Scenery and Character*. In his reading of a scene from the chapter, "The Ohio," Nash concludes, "Even though [Audubon] sensed that this [American settler colonialism] meant the end of what he loved, he hesitated about condemning the westward march" (96-97). According to Nash, Audubon was neither a preservationist nor a conservationist. Simply put, Audubon "put restraint aside" in favor of allowing the American civilization's westward expansion to carry on without critique (97).

Later readings of Audubon locate other sites of paradox in the work of the naturalist and artist. Since at least Annette Kolodny's *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975), Audubon has been recast as a figure with conflicting desires to passively enjoy or actively manipulate the natural environment. In her book, Kolodny argues that a "uniquely pastoral impulse" motivated early American writers to fetishize the earth as nurturing and feminine.[19] Audubon's work, she suggests, "revealed, as first-person experience […] the difficulty of maintaining the precarious balance between intimacy and exploitation" (73). The recent history of the American environment, our "current ecological crisis," Kolodny writes, demonstrates that the precarious position is impossible to maintain. Too often, conceiving of the earth in feminine terms leads to its domination, exploitation and, eventually, destruction, she argues. Seemingly innocuous, the "mother earth" metaphor becomes dangerous, even deadly.

According to Kolodny, the frontier episodes collected in *Delineations of American Scenery and Character* exhibit this internal tension: they are attempts "to reconcile conflicting […] impulse[s]" in which "coherent points of view [are] impossible to maintain" (85-86). For Kolodny, the sketches culminate in "tragic contradiction" and a "sad and peculiar irony":

> […] to resolve what is still a central concern within the American psyche—the sense of guilt aroused by the conflict between the impulse to see nature as bountiful and the desire to dominate and make it bountiful—

[19] Kolodny continues: "For, insofar as the patterns of the male psyche had seized the power and determined the course of history in nineteenth-century America, the pastoral impulse inevitably implied the threat of incest and, with it, the specter of violation," 73.

> Audubon attempted to stop time altogether, and preserve the static continuity of a soaring bird and a landscape "before population had greatly advanced." (88)

In "The Ohio" episode, Kolodny writes, Audubon's appeal to "our Irvings and our Coopers" to document the American wilderness before it is "too late" is tragic because it shows that Audubon doesn't think himself worthy of the task (88). By the time Audubon casts out his plea, Kolodny notes, it is already too late. Yet I hesitate to read this statement as a sincere plea that reveals the artist's feelings of inadequacy as a chronicler of American scenery. After all, Audubon makes his request at the beginning of his very own attempt to do exactly what he has requested of "our Irvings and our Coopers"—not only with descriptive language, but in evocative images as well.

By the end of the nineteenth century, avian enthusiasts heralded Audubon as primarily a lover and protector of birds. The first Audubon Society sprang up in 1886, and in the years since, the bird advocacy group has grown to a powerful, nation-wide political force and conservation organization that manages over 500 local chapters. Today, despite the rampant hunting record of its namesake, the word "Audubon" conjures scenes of quietude and patience: treading softly through a dappled path, binoculars in hand, waiting to catch a glint of bright blue or red through a thicket of branches, pausing to follow the outstretched arm of a companion whose finger points to a shadow swirling through the clouds.

To those who are slightly more familiar with the name of Audubon, his public legacy also includes the distinction of being the author of "the most expensive book in

the world."[20] A complete set of the four-volume, double-elephant folio *Birds of America* (of which there are only an estimated 119 extant today) last sold at a Sotheby's auction in 2010 for $11.5 million.[21] The book, if such a term is even appropriate for the massive volumes, is an exquisite object of art. Audubon himself referred to it as his "enormously gigantic Work."[22] Completed in sets of five, the prints were delivered in carefully packaged tins to subscribers. In the colonial period, Linda Dugan Partridge observes, the large format, finely illustrated natural history book was "a mark of wealth" (290); like fine objects of nature, living or dead—exotic birds with their "sensual softness, contour and color"—served as "a sign of opulence" (298). But the immense size of Audubon's prints made displaying them a problem. The "corporeal burden" of Audubon's work, as Jennifer Roberts describes, caused subscribers to create new furniture and other forms of display. One subscriber, Dr. Benjamin Phillips, ordered a custom ottoman with four pull-out shelves to contain each volume (Roberts 84). Others carefully cut out the bird silhouettes and pasted them onto scenic Chinese wallpaper (Roberts Figure 43). Although each image was a print reproduction, individual pages nonetheless carried the aura of singular originals, recapitulating the paradoxical contrast between original specimen and reproduced image.

Today, the rarity of a complete set of *Birds of America* has made it an "endangered book," as John Hoover observes (527). In his review of the updated (2006)

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[20] Several news articles use similar language to describe the value of the book. See, for instance, Gamerman; Zielinski.

[21] See Fries, 172-76. Between 200 and 220 volumes of the *Birds of America* were originally made. Through the years, many sets were disassembled and sold piecemeal. Fries estimates that 119 copies are extant today.

[22] Audubon to William Rathbone, 1826, as quoted in Irmscher, 221.

edition of Waldemar Fries's survey of the publishing and sales history of *The Birds of America*, Hoover notes that the conspirators of "theft, fire, flood, war, and other enemies of books" reveal "an ominous trend" in the health of the remaining *Birds of America* (528). The most recent assailant to the books population came in the form of the so-called "Transy Book Heist," a feature story in popular magazine *Vanity Fair* detailed the attempted theft of a copy of Audubon's *Birds of America* located in the Special Collections at a Kentucky university library. The article describes the attempt as "part *Oceans 11* and part *Harold and Kumar*" foreshadowed the 2018 Hollywood version of that exact event: the blockbuster heist film, *American Animals*. Like the vanishing birds whose existence *Birds of America* chronicles, the book rises in value the rarer it becomes.

The American Woodsman Challenges the Closet Naturalist

Early in his career, in order to establish his method of bird study as the most correct, Audubon set out to discredit the work of some others who have gone before him. Many readers have pointed out that in his early career, Audubon carefully crafted a public persona of himself as a refined, gentler version of a backsettler or frontier character. As biographer Richard Rhodes notes, by 1828, Audubon had begun referring to himself as the "American woodsman" (Rhodes 289). At this time, Audubon was engaged in promotional tours across Scotland and England. To the excitement and delight of the imagination of his potential European subscribers, Audubon modeled his dress after well-known American literary characters such as Cooper's Natty Bumpo (Knott 23). Traveling in a wolf-skin coat, his hair greased with bear-fat pomade, Audubon cultivated an image that was meant to establish himself as an authentic participant in the American outback.

As James C. McKusick notes in *Green Writing: Romanticism and Ecology,* Audubon was skilled at self-promotion. McKusick saw Audubon as a theatrical figure: the nature writer dressing up in "Noble savage" garb to "shock and delight" his audience (6). But just how much of his appearance was for publicity? In the first portrait he ever had engraved, the ornithologist sat in his hunting garb for the Scottish painter John Syme. The portrait itself was commissioned by William Home Lizars, one of Audubon's close friends and patrons. In part, Lizars had conceived of the engraving as promotional material for Audubon's *Birds of America* project.[23] Though Audubon praised Syme as the best portraitist in Scotland, he didn't view his own portrait very kindly. Rather, Audubon expressed with some trepidation that the portrait was even going forward at all. On its completion, he wrote, "It is a strange-looking figure, with gun, strap, and buckles, and eyes that to me are more those of an enraged Eagle than mine" (*Audubon and His Journals I*:168-169).

For Audubon, establishing authenticity as an outdoorsman was an essential first step to claiming authority about American birds and their habits. The backwoodsman persona complimented his critique of naturalists who worked indoors. Audubon began his public critique of the methods of "closet naturalists" as early as 1828, in the essay, "Account of the Method of Drawing Birds," published in the *Edinburgh Journal of Science.* At the time the essay went to press, Audubon was still doing the work of soliciting subscribers around England and France, though the first three sets of plates had been printed and shipped to subscribers a year beforehand. And so, in part, the text

[23] Audubon consented to sit for the portrait, having been persuaded by several of his friends in Scotland that doing so would be good for his career, as he explains in *Audubon and His Journals Vol I,* 157. Audubon did not find the portrait, which now hangs in the White House, to be well done. "I cannot say that I think it a very good resemblance," he comments, 169.

carries an air of an advertisement about it. In his promotional "Account" essay, Audubon sought to soften the "enraged Eagle" eyes of the American woodsman. Although he acknowledges that the "rough hunters and squatters of the frontiers" have often furnished him with "naked facts" about the habits of the birds, Audubon does not wish to be wholly classed with their kind. Rather, Audubon describes his study of the birds in terms of a leisurely (if passionate) gentlemanly pursuit.[24] Within the first paragraph of the essay, he notes that he has spent "if not all my time in that study, at least all that portion generally called leisure" (753).

More importantly, however, in this essay, Audubon sought to distinguish himself from another kind of naturalist: parlor scientists who derive more learning from dried specimens, paper charts, and dusty tomes than experience and observation directly in nature. Audubon contemptibly refers to this class of scientists as "closet naturalists" throughout his career. Closet naturalists, Audubon complains, are responsible for a significant amount of misinformation within the ornithological world: errors that Audubon will not be coy in addressing. "Do not be surprised at finding that I have trampled upon many deeply-rooted prejudices and opinions attached to the habits of several individual by men who had only heard and not seen," he warns his potential subscribers. With nothing other than dried skins and hearsay to draw their conclusions from, closet naturalists at times may fabricate the lives of the animals from poorly preserved representations. Worse yet, Audubon proclaims, such gentlemen scientists, studying nature in their parlors or dusty natural history museums, often exhibit "the astonishing tendency that men have to *improve nature in their way*, by embellishing each

[24] In the 1820s and 1830s when he was working on the Delineations many of the frontier sketches and southern humor stories were published in NYC in periodicals that also covered the sports news of the time.

of their descriptions of habits without any farther object in view than that of entertaining the better their hearers" (757).

Audubon references a misconception stemming from closet naturalists' methods of study in the very first entry of the *Ornithological Biographies*. In the chapter, "Wild Turkey," he notes that other, "closet naturalists suppose" that certain turkey specimens lack a pectoral muscle. But, as Audubon proves by his multiple surveys in the field, he states simply to the reader that the closet naturalists' supposition is, simply, "not the case" (OB:I 15).[25]

Audubon continues to cast doubt on the quality of indoor naturalists' study throughout his work. In discussing the habits of the Wood Pewee, Audubon references a contested fact that even an ornithologist working in the field finds confusing:

> If doubts on the subject exist in the mind of such an observer … who has examined the species … in the very places which these birds frequent, how difficult must it be for a "closet naturalist" to ascertain the true distinctions of these birds, when, having no better samples of the species than some dried skins, perhaps mangled, and certainly distorted, with shriveled bills and withered feet. (OB 2:93)

As Audubon points out, the ornithologist's work is difficult enough when in the field. Out of the field and working from poorly preserved, "mangled" or "distorted" specimens, the closet naturalist's observations are bound to be distorted, as well.[26]

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[25] All the while, Audubon cannot himself refrain from making up stories, for whatever reason. In the same essay, Audubon, in detailing how large he has seen some turkeys grow, writes, "I have… shot barren hens in strawberry season that weighed thirteen pounds, and have seen a few so fat as to burst open on falling from a tree when shot." OB I, 15.

[26] Audubon's critique of closet-naturalists' ignorance of the field heightens in later volumes. Writing of the Meadow Lark, he notes that poorly prepared specimens might even lead to species misidentification. The

That other naturalists rely on stuffed specimens, instead of field observation, is a great concern for Audubon. Though in the "Account" essay he insists, "I have *never* drawn from a stuffed specimen," Audubon's biographers have shown that the ornithologist regularly purchased skins and taxidermy specimens, and had even once worked as a taxidermist himself. Jailed for debts and on the brink of bankruptcy, he took on a position at the Western Museum in Cincinnati as assistant curator at the now-defunct natural history museum. Along with sorting objects for the museum's collection, Audubon also contributed some artifacts of his own, including taxidermy specimens and chalk portraits.

Despite his familiarity with the form, in the "Account" essay, Audubon rates the taxidermists' artifacts as inferior to those of the painterly artist. Generally, Audubon makes his critique on the basis that the methods of most taxidermists were sloppy and left to chance and guess-work. Audubon writes, "I discovered when in museums, where large collections of that kind are to be met with, that the persons *generally* employed for the purpose of mounting them possessed no further talents than that of filling the skins until *plumply formed*, and adorning them with eyes and legs generally from their own fancy" ("Account," 756). As Audubon noted, some taxidermists would fill the dried skin of the specimen with old oil cloths and rags, instead of the preferred method of draping the skins over a carefully measured and sculpted form.

Audubon's critique of the taxidermist is rooted in his perception of the most of them as indoor scientists as well: they "know nothing" of the nature of the animals

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zeal with which the indoor naturalist pursues his object is also to blame. Audubon writes, "I am fully convinced that a great number of young birds, as well as females, have been converted into distinct species, through the lamentable epidemic mania which has infected the closet-naturalists, who found their fame on the invention of useless names." Audubon, OB IV, 75.

they're trying to replicate, from their size and shape to their posture and gait (756). What was missing, most essentially, from the taxidermists' (and closet naturalists') work was careful study in the field. Only meticulous observation of the live subject can lead to accurate representation: as Audubon writes of his method of drawing birds, "The better I understood my subjects, the better I became able to represent them in what I hoped were natural positions" (757). Audubon argues that those who would wish to engage in a serious study of natural history need venture out-of-doors, to "the very places which these birds frequent," in order to gain a clearer vision of the species' habitat and habits (OB 2:93).

Audubon began his field observations in earnest in 1820, when he left his position at the Western Museum to hunt and sketch birds on the Ohio and Mississippi rivers. As he wrote in his journal, his goal was to complete an atlas of American birds: it was his "ardent Wish to Compleat [sic] a collection of drawings of the *Birds* of our Country, from *Nature* all of the Natural *Size*…and to Acquire either by *ocular*, or reliable observations of others the knowledge of their Habits, & residence" (*Writings and Drawings* 51). Audubon's goal of self-sufficiency stands out: by stating his preference for "ocular" observation first, Audubon expresses that first-hand knowledge is more preferable, and reliable, for his study. In a journal entry, dated 16 October 1830, Audubon makes an ambitious claim: "I know I am not a scholar, but meantime I am aware that no man living knows better than I do the habits of our birds; no man living has studied them as much as I have done" (Audubon, *Audubon and His Journals* I:63). Shifting the field of study from the lounge chair to the field, Audubon makes himself out to be the most experienced in the practice of natural history observation in the wild.

Throughout Audubon's work, the message is clear: to know nature, one should go outside and observe it in the field. But how's an artist to make a living by claiming that? And so, Audubon amends his prescription slightly, for the comfort of his audience: they need not venture out of doors, or to a museum; rather, they can better know nature by studying the pictures of Audubon's birds, as he painted them, "alive and moving."

"Alive and Moving"

In the decades following the publication of *Birds of America*, Audubon became an icon of early American conservation. But today, many scholars have pointed out the paradox of associating Audubon, the slayer of birds, with anything connected to conservation. Several of these conversations focus on the inappropriateness of the Audubon legacy in connection to wilderness conservation, while neglecting or only lightly treating the resonances between Audubon and the environmental movement today.

By elevating the painting of the bird above the possession of the specimen, Audubon plays a role in transferring value to the image, rather than the object itself. In the drawings and writing of Audubon, we begin to see a role for the virtuous observer and consumer of American wilderness—one that associates witnessing or glimpsing nature with pleasure and knowledge. In this section, I explore the question: What does it mean for Audubon to insist that paintings and written narrative can tell us more about the nature of a bird than a specimen itself?

The founders of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia insisted that the natural history specimen was essential to the study of nature:

> Natural History can *only* be studied by means of natural objects; and in order to render the latter useful, they must be carefully exhibited, arranged

> and labelled. To effect these important ends requires the cooperation of many individuals, together with much time, labour, and scientific knowledge. (quoted in Prince, 21, emphasis added)[27]

Natural history specimens were often arranged in scenic, dramatic dioramas: a style popularized by Charles Willson Peale (1741-1827), whose Philadelphia Museum of Natural History was one of the most successful museums of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Peale pioneered the theatrical style of natural history displays by arranging specimens, alongside rocks and vegetation, in front of dramatic landscape paintings to capture a scene from nature. In *Mr. Peale's Museum: Charles Willson Peale and the First Popular Museum of Natural Science and Art*, scholar Charles Sellers notes that Peale's innovative habitat groups for natural history specimens came not from his familiarity with Linnaean natural history, but from his artist's eye. "He created his museum as he would a picture," Sellers writes (19). Many scholars, including Sellers, have suggested that Audubon was inspired to depict his bird drawings amid dramatic backdrops because of the natural history dioramas that Peale had popularized.[28]

As we've already seen, Audubon doubted that taxidermy could further scientific knowledge, partly on the basis that many specimens were poorly prepared by laborers who were unfamiliar with the habits of the specimens they were handling. Yet Audubon's critique of taxidermy wasn't limited to the quality of the prepared specimens. Audubon in fact claimed that the vibrant hints and hues of bird plumage began to disappear after a bird's death, sometimes in as little as twenty-four hours. As Roberta Olson of the New

[27] From the pamphlet *Circular*, issued by the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, 1829:2.

[28] For further examples in this trend, see Sellers; Prince 17; and Olson 21.

York Historical Society points out, Audubon believed that birds lost seventy-five percent of their "brilliant color" within a day (482). Though Audubon had insisted on this fact, modern scientists have demonstrated otherwise.[29]

In the introductory narrative to the first volume of *Ornithological Biographies* in 1831, Audubon claims that his inspiration for that very project arose in part from the failures of taxidermy to convey the beauty of the birds. Initially, Audubon relates his wish to possess "all that [he] saw" to his fervent desire for knowledge of nature. The two desires, to possess and understand nature, remain thematically linked throughout his work. Yet he writes that he discovered at an early age that possessing a wild creature catalyzes, almost immediately, its slow destruction:

> The moment a bird was dead, however beautiful it had been when in life, the pleasure arising from the possession of it became blunted; and although the greatest care was bestowed on endeavors to preserve the appearance of nature, I looked upon its vesture as more than sullied, as requiring constant attention and repeated mendings, while, after all, it could no longer be said to be fresh from the hands of its Maker. (*Ornithological Biographies, Vol. I*, vii)

That stuffed specimens took so much effort to preserve was another mark against their ability to portray birds in what he referred to elsewhere as "the state of nature." Though skilled in the art of taxidermy, Audubon finds stuffed specimens an insufficient response to this problem. Two factors make taxidermy a weak answer to Audubon's desires: the

[29] In the late eighteenth century, naturalists at the Natural History Museum in Paris advanced techniques in specimen preservation by skinning and preparing bird skins with various pesticides, then mounting the skins on prepared models and sealing them in glass boxes. This process could protect the specimen from insect damage and preserve the specimen for decades. See Larsen, 370.

obvious change from the live to the dead specimen, and the subtler changes that the art of taxidermy is insufficient to protect against, such as the fading of plumage and the loss of mobility. The passage continues:

> I wished to possess all the productions of nature, but I wished life with them. This was impossible. Then what was to be done? I turned to my father…. He produced a book of *Illustrations*. (*Ornithological Biographies, Vol. I*, vii)

Audubon realizes that what he longs for—the complete possession of nature—is impossible. But his father's gift of the book of *Illustrations* appears to Audubon as a potential answer to the paradoxical problem. Audubon remarks that possessing a bird, when alive, brought the most pleasure, but that that pleasure became "blunted" immediately at its death, "however beautiful it had been when in life." The beauty of the bird is not just in its aesthetic value as an object, but in the appearance of life. Something of the bird's beauty is lost at its death, to the extent that it diminishes the pleasure the object initially inspires. A strange thing happens next in the passage: in detailing his efforts to preserve the specimen, Audubon writes that "the greatest care was bestowed on endeavors to preserve the appearance," but where the reader would expect Audubon to refer to the appearance of the bird, Audubon instead writes the "appearance of *nature.*" Nature here becomes more than mere matter: it signifies something wild, elusive, alive—it becomes something only possible by representation, not the artifact itself.

In the above quoted passage, *Illustrations* supply the answer to the problem of preserving nature that taxidermy has failed to answer. Yet Audubon's own method of

drawing took years to develop.[30] At Audubon's time, the popular practice of drawing animals in profile in natural history texts (dating from the mediaeval age) depicted birds in what Audubon described as "all represented *strickly ornithologically*, which means… in Stiff unmeaning profiles" (*Writings and Drawings* ed. Irmscher, 759). Audubon wanted to shift the method of ornithological representation to include hints of the birds' habits and habitat in his drawings, in addition to portraying birds in what Audubon refers to as "families": male, female, and young in clusters. In addition, the *Birds of America* paintings often capture the specimens in poses that display many of the characteristic parts and movements of the species: waterfowl, for instance, are depicted swimming through clear, transparent water so that their feet and swimming movements are visible.

Unlike the ornithological drawings of Comte de Buffon and his contemporaries, which often cast their objects in motionless poses in blank space, Audubon's plates often emphasize the habits and habitat of the birds they depict.[31] In "My Style of Drawing Birds," Audubon relates that this insight to draw from nature came as a stroke of genius. The inspiration, Audubon writes, came while he was observing birds in the wild: "I looked so intently on their innocent attitudes, that a thought struck my Mind like a flash

[30] Though the evolution of this process for a long time remained an enigma to scholars. A discovery in 1995 began to help scholars piece together how Audubon's method evolved from a variety of influences spanning the Atlantic. One-hundred and thirty pastel drawings that Audubon had completed before his return to France in 1805, were gifted to his second mentor in ornithology, Charles-Marie d'Orbigny and found in the attic of the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle de la Rochelle, Collection Société des Sciences Naturelles de la Charente-Maritime, in France. These represent Audubon's earliest extant drawings, and show the young apprentice trying to bridge the gap between artist and naturalist. Audubon's early studies, but in positions equally unlikely to be seen in nature. Following *nature mort* conventions of the time, Audubon's birds appear hanging mid-air, sometimes suspended from their feet, in clear corpse-like fashion. Audubon's commitment to revolutionizing the conventions of natural history illustration appears in these early drawings. Few of this type of drawings Audubon describes can be found in his early works. Many of the pastels found in the La Rochelle museum collection depict bird corpses dangling mid-air from a string, sometimes with the aid of a pin to create different angles.

[31] Although Audubon did, on occasion, matched birds with the wrong landscapes or tree species, this feature nevertheless remains significant in Audubon's most celebrated prints.

of light, that nothing after all could ever answer my Anthusiastic [sic] desires to represent nature, than to attempt to Copy her in her own Way, alive and Moving!" (*Writings and Drawings* 760). The stiff profiles cannot suffice as a sufficient copy for the study of nature, Audubon suggests. Rather, for Audubon, images of nature must convey life—they must show something is more than a specimen, but has a history and world of its own. By positioning the birds in nature, select images of *Birds of America* attempt to bring the viewer into the field, and, therefore, the practice of natural history itself: wandering through the woods and swamps and observing the specimens.

In order to attempt to depict nature "alive and moving," Audubon departed from the practice of drawing from stuffed specimens and instead developed a method of his own, in which he drew from fresh specimens, arranged, with the assistance of wire and woodblock, in what he knew (or assumed to be) natural positions. Audubon described his method in "My Style of Drawing Birds," he first experimented with this method in his drawing of a kingfisher. In his relation of the process, he notes, "Even the eye of the Kings fisher was as if full of Life before me whenever I pressed its Lids aside with a finger" (761). Focusing in on the eye, Audubon uses the only exposed tissue on a specimen most clearly requiring an artificial substitute to highlight the contrast between drawing from nature and drawing from the mannequin: the porous, squishiness of this organ, vulnerable and exposed in a way unlike the rest of the visible exterior of the bird, makes Audubon's gesture crude, and may cause some disgust on the part of the reader.

Beginning with the second set of plates released to the *Birds of America* subscribers, Audubon had the engravers include a small inscription in the bottom left-hand corner, which stated "Drawn from Nature by J. J. Audubon." The line "drawn from

nature" would remain Audubon's signature in all of his plates, reminding the viewer of Audubon's experience in the field. The word "drawn," as it appears in Audubon's images, suggests the dual meanings of "taken from" and "rendered." As Elisa New puts it, the signature "acknowledges […] the inexact nature of a thing rendered […] *from* Nature but it also fixes the plate's unique aura" (86). Yet the repeated phrase "drawn from nature" on all of the plates throughout *Birds of America* might seem deceptive to a modern reader unfamiliar with the signature's historical context. Audubon confesses that his drawings are generally composed by consulting a conglomerate of moments in his mind—never the exact same specimens populating the exact same branch in the precise attitude in which they're found in the plate. Thus, while the plates of *Birds of America* are strewn with this very inscription, "Drawn from Nature," this claim of Audubon's doesn't refer to the reproduction of the object so much as it does the differentiation in naturalist techniques. Occurring throughout scientific atlases of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the phrase "drawn from nature" referred not to taking a plant or animal likeness in situ, but, rather, to differentiate images that were copied from atlases and those that were sketched from models or dried skins.

Elsewhere in the article "Account of my Method," Audubon argues that "the naturalist […] ought to be artist also." Audubon set himself apart from others who had produced well-known works of ornithology, such as the Comte de Buffon, who employed others to do drawings for his illustrated works (Audubon "Account," 756). Not only did Audubon suggest that the illustrator and the naturalist should be the same person, but that the naturalist should also be an artist of feeling. Audubon explains that the naturalist will fail if he does not "feed his pencil with all belonging to a mind perfectly imbued with a

knowledge of real forms, muscles, bones, movements, and, lastly, that *spiritual expression of feelings that paintings like his exhibit so beautifully*" (756, emphasis added). Here, Audubon makes the claim that the scientist should not be devoid of feeling, a detached observer, but have the sensibilities of a romantic painter.

Audubon's development of this hybrid style—that which combined the exactness of the naturalist with the emotional sensibility of the painterly artist—is what caused him, in his early attempts at the *Birds of America* project, to have "*destroyed* and disposed of nearly all the drawings [he] had accumulated."[32] Having burned upward of 200 drawings, Audubon commenced his project anew. In the "Account" essay, Audubon reiterates that one of the goals of the drawings was "impelled by the constant inviting sight of new and beautiful specimens which I longed to possess" (753). Audubon similarly wrote in the introduction to the first volume of *Ornithological Biographies* that his wish to "possess all the productions of nature [… with] life within them" was "impossible" (OB I:vii). The answer to the paradoxical problem lay not in possessing the objects themselves, but by embodying the right attitude and perception toward nature. Immediately following Audubon's statement that the *Birds of America* project was motivated by his desire to "possess" the "new and beautiful specimens" of nature, he writes: "Discoveries, however, succeeded each other sufficiently rapidly to give me transient hopes, and regularity of application at length made me possessor of a style that I have continued to follow to this day" (753). Unable to possess the birds, alive and moving, Audubon becomes the possessor of a "style" that best answers his hopes. Audubon's project, hereafter, is to

[32] Or so he claims to have done. Audubon, "Account", 753.

train the viewer to appreciate and value *his* style and drawings over those of his predecessors (and competitors).

So how did Audubon's style appear on the page? First, some general information: the original edition of *Birds of America* was printed in the largest format available at the time, measuring a staggering 29 ½ by 39 ½ inches. The pages are so large that, when bound together, they require two hands to turn without bending or tearing the sheets. The format allows for all the birds to be depicted life-size.[33] In all, the complete first edition of *Birds of America* contained 435 plates, totaling 1065 birds. The plates were issued to subscribers generally in sets of five, one large, one medium, and three small prints at a time. Unlike other atlases, where species were grouped and presented according to genus, the order of illustrations in Audubon's *Birds of America* and *Ornithological Biographies* is not taxonomical according to Linnaean systems, but appears in what Adam Gopnik described as "democratic disorder."[34] But as others have noted, the order of the prints also has a theatrical element: upon arrival, the first print a subscriber would likely encounter was the largest, most detailed print.

Shipping and delivery of Audubon's double-elephant folios was an event itself. In her book *Transporting Visions*, Jennifer Roberts observes that communicating via images in the nineteenth century was a major shipping and transportation investment: visual

[33] For the engravings, which had to be carved into a plate and then hand-colored after, to the lithograph. Audubon engaged the services of Robert Havell Jr., noted as the "greatest engraver in Britain" produced most all of the engravings for the double-elephant folio edition of *Birds of America* from 1827-1838.

[34] As quoted in Irmscher, 221. Audubon changed the ordering of his plates in the *Birds of America*, however, for the American release of what's known as the Royal Octavo edition. At one-eighth the size of the double-elephant folio atlas, the Royal Octavo sold for $100 and was also published with text from the *Ornithological Biographies*. Rather, Audubon, like Buffon, organizes his subjects in apparently random order, starting with the turkey. Audubon does, however, organize the later, American Octavo (that is, the smaller) edition (1840-1844) according to taxonomic categories.

communication required that "a picture (a physical thing) […] be floated, rolled or dragged across the surface of the earth" (1). As she points out, the birds of Audubon's pictures had a much easier time travelling through the American landscape than the pictures themselves (5). Roberts's emphasis on the methods and mode of transportation lead her to suggest that Audubon "treated the practice of representation as a material transposition rather than an optical or a conceptual transformation, a commitment he developed after failing as a merchant-importer in the Ohio River Valley" (6).

The *Ornithological Biographies* were published in five volumes from 1831 to 1839, the first three volumes share the exhaustive title *Ornithological biography, or an account of the habits of the birds of the United States of America; accompanied by descriptions of the objects represented in the work entitled* The Birds of America*, and interspersed with delineations of American scenery and manners*. In the bird biographies of these first volumes, Audubon not only details the habits and habitat of a number of the birds depicted in his atlas, but also narrates the story of many a hunting expedition, sublime sunrise, chance encounter and, above all, the "American woodsman" (as Audubon often refers to himself) in the wild. Between these scientific sketches, Audubon includes sixty episodes, often referred to as "delineations" of "American scenery and manners." These episodes range from encounters with eccentric personalities, to scenic or speculative observations, to the creation of new myths of the frontier.[35]

[35] In contrast, the final two volumes of *Ornithological Biographies* include, as their title indicates, "an account of the digestive organs of many of the species, illustrated by engravings on wood." While Audubon the woodsman still features heavily in these scientific sketches, they also include exhaustive measurements of individual bird specimen's various limbs and organs. The final two volumes more often give measurements of individual specimens, rather than generalizing comments on the weight and size of the general species. As a supplement to prior drawings and narrative sketches, the data of volumes four and five of the *Ornithological Biographies* bring Audubon up to speed with what Noah Heringman terms "Romantic Science," that is, science concerned, like Romantic literature, with the particularity of the individual, happening on the other side of the Atlantic (7).

The format and order of the Birds of America contributed to Audubon's scheme to represent the winged specimens as "alive and moving," as the large size helped readers envision the birds as they really were, which contributed to their knowledge of ornithology. In her chapter, "By the Book: Audubon and the Tradition of Ornithological Illustration," Linda Dugan Partridge noted that Audubon's claims to have "rejected" the "old style" of ornithological illustration were overblown, and that several similarities exist between Audubon's sketches and those of his contemporaries (97). But, though many of Audubon's single-specimen plates did appear to conform to more traditional forms of scientific illustration, as a whole, Audubon's works generated vastly different responses from his readers at the time. In *John James Audubon and the* Birds of America*: A Visionary Achievement in Ornithological Illustration* (2006), Lee A. Vedder notes that many American natural historians of Audubon's day preferred the "traditional and more scientific approach to bird illustration" exemplified by Alexander Wilson, Audubon's competitor, "while some found Audubon's animated images rather lurid and brash" (24).

Most importantly, Audubon wanted his readers to experience his birds as works of art. Nowhere is this more beautifully done than in the plate and accompanying biography of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker. The plate of this bird depicts three specimens crowded around a tree: two females and one male. The focus of the three birds is all directed at one spot in the middle of the painting, where the woodpecker has detached a patch of moss-covered bark from the tree, exposing a plump, black beetle. Atop the painting, one female woodpecker seems to peer out around the branch. Both she and the male to the left appear ready to strike, their sharp, white beaks nearly equidistant from the juicy morsel. In the bottom right-hand corner, the second female is shown with her claws

spread wide across the center branch, digging in for support as she prepares to attack the bark with her beak once more. Two pieces of bark float in the blank space behind the female, having recently been pecked and flung from the tree. The image is full of action, caught in a moment of suspense: Which bird will be the first to pluck the beetle from the bark and gobble it down?

In addition to the drama on display, as Christoph Irmscher observes in "Audubon at Large," the plate of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is also scientifically useful. As Irmscher writes, the drawing is "ornithologically exact, since it demonstrates [the woodpeckers'] ability…to balance themselves against trees or even grapevines by using their strong claws" (189). But, Irmscher also notes, the "amazing ballet of birds is also effective artistically, as an image of carefully controlled dynamism." Representative of Audubon's mature work, the plate of the Ivory-billed Woodpecker is evidence for Irmscher that these ornithological illustrations were also "highly charged works of art" (195).

Interestingly enough, the connection between bird representation and art is more clearly made in Audubon's biographical sketch of the ivory-billed woodpecker in *Ornithological Biographies*. The first paragraph of Audubon's description is worth quoting at length:

> I have always imagined, that in the plumage of the beautiful Ivory-billed Woodpecker, there is something very closely allied to the style of colouring of the great VANDYKE. The broad extent of its dark glossy body and tail, the large and well-defined markings of its wings, neck, and bill, relieved by the rich carmine of the pendent crest of the male, and the

> brilliant yellow of its eye, have never failed to remind me of some of the boldest and noblest productions of that inimitable artist's pencil. So strongly indeed have these thoughts become ingrafted in my mind, as I gradually obtained a more intimate acquaintance with the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, that whenever I have observed one of these birds flying from one tree to another, I have mentally exclaimed, "There goes a Vandyke!" (WD; 269)

In this passage, Audubon suggests that the ivory-billed woodpecker resembles the art of the wildly successful, seventeenth-century portraitist Anthony van Dyck, who was known for his ability to capture a sense of movement in his paintings. It is likely that Audubon's van Dyck reference was intended to endow a luxury, elite value upon his work: as the *Birds of America* was first published in England, prospective subscribers there would be well-acquainted with the Dutch portraitist. In his lengthy comparison of the bird and the artist's trademark palate, Audubon suggests that the the naturally occurring animal is reminiscent of the works of the painterly artist, and not the other way around. Even more curious is Audubon's claim that, as he "gradually obtained…more intimate" knowledge of the species, the connection between the bird and the painter's works appeared stronger, rather than diminished, by the ornithologist's more familiar acquaintance with the individual traits of the bird that would, one assumed, suggest the species as more different, unique and unlike a courtly portrait. Guiding the reader through the trees on a humid Louisiana afternoon, as he exclaims, "There goes a Vandyke!", Audubon transforms the bird into a painting in flight.

In the following passage, Audubon invites the reader to assess the soundness of his comparison by turning, not to nature, but to his own representation of the ivory-billed woodpeckers in the *Birds of America*:

> This notion may seem strange, perhaps ludicrous, to you, good reader, but I relate it as a fact, and whether or not it may be found in accordance with your own ideas, after you have inspected the plate in which is represented this great chieftain of the Woodpecker tribe, is perhaps of little consequence. (WD; 269-70)

Here, Audubon suggests that his painting of the bird takes precedence for performing such a comparison over the specimen itself. Though Irmscher chuckles, "Audubon is no van Dyck," he also doesn't say that Audubon's claim is outrageous (189).

However successfully Audubon and his critics felt that his paintings conveyed life within them, in the same essay, Audubon doubts that the same could ever be accomplished with a painting of a landscape. Audubon laments to the reader:

> Would that I could represent to you the dangerous nature of the ground, its oozy, spongy, and miry disposition, although covered with a beautiful but treacherous carpeting, composed of the richest mosses, flags, and water-lilies, no sooner receiving the pressure of the foot than it yields and endangers the very life of the adventurer, whilst here and there, as he approaches an opening, that proves merely a lake of black, muddy water, his ear is assailed by the dismal croaking of innumerable frogs, the hissing of serpents, or the bellowing of alligators! [The]… sultry, pestiferous

> atmosphere that nearly suffocates the intruder during the meridian head of our dogdays, in those gloomy and horrible swamps! (*OB 1*:342)

Although the surface of the swamp appears beautiful from afar, "composed of the richest mosses… and water-lilies," it is a "treacherous carpeting," a deceiving beauty. The landscape, with its appealing surface, conceals its true nature—that it is in fact "dangerous," "oozy," "treacherous," "pestiferous," "gloomy," and "horrible"—its oozy openings filled with "dismal" frogs and menacing alligators. By repeating Buffon's prejudice against reptiles, insects, and amphibians, Audubon here helps buttress his claim that birds are noble species. Though Audubon insists throughout on the ability of his drawings to produce a mimetic vision of the birds, he laments that no portrait of the above scene could actually impress upon the reader the full character of the landscape. Reflecting on the swamp, Audubon writes that "the attempt to picture these scenes would be vain. Nothing short of ocular demonstration can impress any adequate idea of them" (OB 1:342). Audubon's portrait of the ivory billed woodpeckers doesn't include any hint of the swamp. Other than the few branches that the birds perch on, the background is entirely negative space. Audubon invites the reader to imagine, instead, the hair-raising swamp that the naturalist claims he trekked through in order to find and procure these specimens.

The descriptive swamp scene is also meant to remind the reader of the immense labor the artist/naturalist undergoes in order to complete the bird portraits. Later in the essay, Audubon reports being annoyed at hearing that some collectors have been surprised at the cost of an ivory billed woodpecker specimen. He compares the collector's reaction to that of an uneducated or unsophisticated consumer of art:

> I must say, that it has at least grieved me as much as when I have heard some idle fop complain of the poverty of the Gallery of the Louvre, where he had paid nothing, or when I have listened to the same infatuated idler lamenting the loss of his shilling, as he sauntered through the Exhibition Rooms of the Royal Academy of London, or any equally valuable repository of art. (OB 1:342)

By comparing the bird collector and the museum goer, Audubon invites the reader to see the products (specimens and art) as objects with cultural value beyond the material itself.

Other moments in the *Ornithological Biographies* seem to be crafted to enhance the verisimilitude of the paintings to the natural objects they represent. In the *Ornithological Biographies* chapter on the Vulture, Audubon recounts how, in repeated, gruesome experiments, he and his friend the Reverend John Bachman set out to dispel a belief, firmly-held by natural historians in the early 1830s, that vultures found their carrion feasts through their keen sense of smell, not eyesight. Such experiments entailed spraying the ground with blood, issuing out of a slit in a piglet's throat, depositing the carcass nearby, and covering the flayed animal with grass. Then, Audubon and Bachman hid in the bush. Although in Audubon's dramatic narrative, the stench from the decomposing hog was strong enough to kill a man, no vultures were enticed out of the sky to inspect the putrid flesh. To test vultures' eyesight, in contrast, the natural historians created artful carrion replicas. Audubon constructed a "pretended animal" by packing the dry, chemically treated skin of a deer with hay, and Bachman made a painting of a skinned and flayed sheep. Each then displayed their artifact in a field, and waited. The vultures descended, scraping at the stuffed deer's clay eyes, ripping open its

stitching, and turning over the hay in hopes of discovering the meat. They similarly attacked the painting, tearing and tugging at the canvas; but Audubon quotes, seeming "much disappointed and surprised" at the painting's trickery, the vultures flew away. In addition, the experiment seems to reinforce Audubon's claims that a visual representation can convey the idea of a bird species "alive and moving" whereas the sense of smell, more important for the hunting of some carnivores, was irrelevant; thus a customer should buy an Audubon print rather than an odorous bird specimen.

Audubon's drawing of the black vulture depicts the body of the bird almost as though coiled around the severed head of a deer, its wing draped over the antlers as if it were wrapping the creature in a menacing embrace, its beak a mere inch from the soft, exposed eye of the deer. A second vulture, crouched behind the first, directs its beak toward its fellow's head, yet its bloodshot eye peers out at the viewer, arresting her in its gaze. Though there's no evidence of the ripping or shredding described in the essay, the plate feels as full of tension and impending action as the essay—more violence is yet to come.

In *Picturing Nature,* Ann Shelby Blum notes that Audubon's drawings diminished "the conceptual separation" between wild nature and the viewer (105). Irmscher agrees, noting that Audubon's work in the plates of *Birds of America* "made the viewer participate in an experience rather than, as had been the tradition, contemplate from a safe distance a scientific fact" (195). Both critics agree that the drawings alone succeed in inviting the viewer into the landscape, to participate in the experience of catching a sight of the bird. Elisa New, in *The Line's Eye: Poetic Experience* (1998), offers a similar reading: "The enduring merit of [Audubon's] plates […] is in the quality

of force they represent." She continues, "An Audubon plate records the visual event he called a 'sighting,' where eye and world seem to mingle substance in reverie" (80).

Throughout the *Ornithological Biographies*, Audubon instructs the reader on not only where to look, but on how to look. In many instances throughout the bird essays, Audubon asks that the reader pause, look up, and consult the drawings of the *Birds of America* as she continues to read. At times, Audubon narrates the scene, as though the birds were alive and moving. In the essay on the Purple Grackle, he notes:

> I could not think of *any better mode of representing these birds than that which I have adopted*, as it exhibits them in the exercise of their nefarious propensities. *Look at them*: The male, as if full of delight at the sight of the havoc which he has already committed on the tender, juicy, unripe corn on which he stands, has swelled his throat, and is calling in exultation to his companions. (emphasis added)

In the above passage, Audubon reminds the reader that scene they are viewing isn't a faithful image of a single moment that the naturalist has witnessed and recorded. Rather, he notes, the print is a collage: an expression of an arrangement of birds, composed first in the thoughts of the artist/naturalist before becoming a scene on the page. Audubon instructs, "Look at them," reminding the reader to consult the painting in order to better comprehend the nature of the bird, engaged in the "nefarious" activity of eating the farmer's corn.

Audubon's bird essays also work to remind the reader that he believes that ornithology should be a "journey of pleasure," as he wrote in the "Account" essay (1828). Audubon routinely references the pleasure and delight of the viewer as a driving force

behind the project itself. In the essay on the Carolina Parrot, he notes, "Doubtless, kind reader, you will say, while looking at the seven figures of Parakeets represented in the plate, that I spared not my labor. I never do, so anxious am I to promote your pleasure" (WD 233).

Such references also implicate the reader in the work of hunting and shooting the birds. Later on in the essay of the Carolina Parrot (a species that is now extinct), Audubon writes that he has killed more of these birds than he has drawn, in order to present the choicest of specimens to his viewer: "I […] procured a basketful of these birds at a few shots, in order to make choice of good specimens for drawing the figures by which this species is represented in the plate now under your consideration" (234). Audubon routinely collects birds by the "basketful," sometimes having shot and killed so many that he resorts to stuffing them in his shirt and pockets in order to transport them from the field to his drawing studio. Audubon repeatedly justifies his rampant specimen collecting as a requirement of accurate representation for the pleasure of the viewer: as Irmscher reminds us, "in order to wield his pen… Audubon had to wield the gun first" (208). After detailing a fairly prolific specimen collection event, Audubon asks his readers to "excuse these murders, which in truth might not have been nearly so numerous, had I not thought of you quite as often while on the Florida Keys" (*BA* 6: 432). The reader's desire for knowledge overtakes Audubon's own and becomes the force behind the prolific gun.

As Elisa New points out in *The Line's Eye*, Annette Kolodny's reading of the plates collapses Audubon's (and the reader's) desire for knowledge into violence itself; they are nearly interchangeable. But New wishes to disassociate Audubon's quest for

knowledge of the birds with violence. Rather, she claims, the paradox between the beautiful, vital, living birds and the violence of Nature itself is precisely the subject that the *Birds of America* drawings explore. New writes, "Through the gun sight Audubon glimpses the very subject of his art: that paradox of mortal perishability and vital animation to which the very resplendence of the animals gives expression" (81). Unlike Kolodny, New argues that the beauty of the plates isn't a way to disguise the violence of the naturalist's profession—or of the frontier moment more generally—it is the very theme that the drawings make visible. For New, the violence is inherent in the scope of the drawings. Her claim is strongly put: "What is not in any case disputable is that Audubon's birds are rendered at the moment of the kill" (81). Yet New provides little in the way of evidence for this statement. Furthermore, several of Audubon's descriptive episodes direct the viewer's attention in ways other than to look at the birds solely "through the gun sight."

Audubon's directions to the viewer include, at times, descriptions of birds in which they become something else. What is lovely about the birds is how much they are able to suggest other objects of beauty or art. As we've already seen, Audubon makes the case for the Ivory-billed woodpeckers as the artwork of portraitist van Dyck. In other moments, the birds become self-referential objects to other instances of natural splendor: the ruby-throated humming bird becomes a "glittering fragment of the rainbow" (WD 248).

Audubon and Conservation

To many readers of Audubon's work today, it is odd that his name is associated with a prominent environmental conservation organization. That Audubon, the destroyer

of so many birds, is synonymous with biodiversity and the Audubon Society seems paradoxical. Many contemporary readers of Audubon centralize his prolific hunting career in their reading of the artist-naturalist's work. Irmscher questions the rapacity of Audubon's hunting, asking, "Did Audubon really have to obtain birds by, literally, the basketful?" (207). Irmscher puts it more grimly later in the chapter: "Clutching his double-barreled shotgun, he seems like a helpless god of destruction—aware of his own baseness, but incapable of keeping his own lethal impulses at bay" (217). Other scholars describe the *Birds of America* images as though they were filled with wounded, maimed animals, rather than the birds soaring through the air. In *Fatal Revolutions: Natural History, West Indian Slavery, and the Routes of American Literature* Christopher Iannini describes *Birds of America* as a work of "extravagant violence" (255).

While many scholars have focused on the paradox inherent on Audubon the hunter as the namesake of a conservation organization, I don't agree with the sense of outrage that others feel in the use of Audubon's name for a conservation organization. Rather, I suggest that there are even more parallels between Audubon's work and the ideas upholding outdoor-recreation-based or participation-driven conservation organizations. First, however, I want to explore a bit of the history of the Audubon society and how early members of that society squared their organization with its namesake.

Prior to the founding of the first Audubon society, the American Ornithologist's Union (AOU) was established in 1883, with the joint purposes of preserving bird populations and creating an organized body to share knowledge. The group acknowledged that specimens had become an important economic asset: as the use of

plumage for decorating women's hats and dresses grew, so did the demand for the birds that provided these feathers. In response, the AOU drafted early legislation for bird preservation that permitted hunting of certain game birds, but excluded those that were not traditional table fare. Of course, the AOU permitted ornithologists to hunt whatever specimens, in the name of science, as Frank Gilbert Jr. observes.

Three years following the founding of the AOU, the aptly named George Bird Grinnell founded the first Audubon Society for the Protection of Birds. At the time, Grinnell was an avid hunter, as well as the proprietor and a contributor to *Forest and Stream*, a popular gaming magazine. The American Ornithologist's Union already had established a publication for their society, entitled, "The Auk," which was named in reference to the first North American bird to go extinct post-contact in the New World. Grinnell launched a magazine for his society in addition, *The Audubon Magazine*. In the first volume, Grinnell outlined some of the founding principles and goals of the new organization, and penned an article on the society's namesake. As a child, Grinnell lived in Audubon Park, the former estate of John James Audubon near Philadelphia, where he was a pupil of Lucy Bakewell Audubon, John James's widow. Grinnell grew up with nearly all of the late ornithologist's trophies, writings, drawings and other artifacts of travel at his fingertips: stuffed specimens of exotic birds with rich colors to delight and provoke his imagination; copies of Audubon's *Ornithological Biographies*, which he studied with relish. Audubon, as historian Frank Graham Jr. writes, was Grinnell's "childhood hero." In the first volume of *Audubon Magazine*, Grinnell wrote that he had

founded and named the society after the person he considered the "greatest of American ornithologists."[36]

The first edition of *Audubon Magazine* opened with an editorial declaring risks that the women's fashion industry posed to the future health of avian populations across America: "Within the past few years, the destruction of our birds has increased at a rate which is alarming," the editors wrote. The passage continues:

> This destruction now takes place on such a large scale as to seriously threaten the existence of a number of our most useful species. It is carried on chiefly by men and boys who sell the skins or plumage to be used for ornamental purposes—principally for the trimming of women's hats, bonnets and clothing. […] One New York firm recently had a contract to supply 40,000 skins of American birds to one Paris firm. These figures tell their own story—but it is a story which might be known even without them; we may read it plainly enough in the silent hedges, once vocal with the morning songs of birds, and in the deserted fields where once bright plumage flashed in the sunlight. (*The Audubon Magazine,* vol. I, 1887. 20)

Problematically, for the avian enthusiasts of the Audubon society, the value of bird specimens was, again, attached to the body of the stuffed bird: the artifact that Audubon had declared was incapable of delivering to the consumer the full delight of "possessing" the bird. Audubon's writings and drawings, which promoted the value of the material representation of the bird over the body of the specimen itself, were in keeping with the goals of the conservation society.

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[36] George Bird Grinnell, *Audubon Magazine*, Vol. I. As quoted in Graham, 9.

By 1888, overwhelmed with other responsibilities, Grinnell left the Audubon society and the organization effectively disbanded until 1896, when New York socialite Harriet Hemenway reclaimed the name of the organization as part of a renewed effort at ending the fashion industry's destruction of native birds. With renewed interest in Audubon's legacy, his granddaughter, Maria Rebecca Audubon, published a highly edited and stylized version of John James's 1843 Missouri River journals, in the collection *Audubon and His Journals*, in 1897.[37] In her preface, Maria Rebecca acknowledged the assistance of several advisors, including George Bird Grinnell, in the creation of the current edition. Additionally, she admitted that some of the original materials had been lost in a fire. Her motivation for the volume, she claimed, was to restore a more faithful representation of her grandfather to the world, as the biography written by Lucy Bakewell contained several editorial additions that the family considered both unflattering and untrue (*Audubon and His Journals*, ix).

Though readers have known for some time that Maria Rebecca's version of her grandfather's journals was suspicious, in 2017, Daniel Patterson's *The Missouri River Journals of John James Audubon* revealed the extent of the "bowdlerization." After comparing lost copies of manuscript fragments against the published version, Patterson concluded:

> It was his granddaughter's spurious edition of his journals that had led many to regard Audubon as a remarkably early conservationist, despite his killing of untold thousands of birds and other animals, which he himself reported in his massive prose work *Ornithological Biography* (1831-39).

[37] Patterson reads more nefarious intent into the revisions, calling it a "heavily edited, bowdlerized, and partially forged edition, "4.

> When the recovered partial copies of the original expedition journals showed me that his granddaughter had essentially manufactured in 1897 the man she wished her grandfather had been in 1843, I understood that all discussions of his thought about conservation and hunting were based upon tainted evidence, but that no one had known that. (ivi-xvii)

But Maria Rebecca was not alone in her efforts to revise Audubon's legacy.[38] The ornithologist himself sought to soften the violence apparent within his earliest writings. As early as the publication of the Royal Octavo edition of the *Birds of America* (a smaller, more-affordable version), Audubon and his sons had edited many of the episodes to exclude or tame the hunting narratives within the bird biographies.

The softer version of Audubon appeared again in a children's book tied to the growth of Audubon societies. In 1901, Hezekiah Butterworth published *In the Days of Audubon: A Tale of the Protector of Birds*, in which he states that part of his motivation for writing the piece was "to encourage the forming of societies for the protection of birds" (vii). Butterworth acknowledges that his book "follows the methods of historical fiction," in that some of the scenes and dialogue have been wholly imagined by the author. But, he claims, the "narrative and illustrated anecdotes are substantially true," though comparison between Audubon's biography as reconstructed by scholars such as Richard Rhodes reveals otherwise.

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[38] As Patterson points out, many readers have referenced the 1843 journal as evidence of Audubon's growing conservationist ethic. But one of the most frequently cited passages from the journal, which Patterson refers to as the "Great Auk" speech, doesn't appear in any of the partial manuscript copies. Patterson provides evidence that Maria Rebecca added the "Great Auk" sentence, which reads as follows: "Even now there is a perceptible difference in the size of the herds, and before many years the Buffalo, like the Great Auk, will have disappeared; surely this should not be permitted," 12. Patterson notes that the Great Auk was not extinct in 1843, so the reference is ahistorical. But what he fails to notice is that the Audubon Ornithological Society had named their journal, "The Auk," after this species, further implicating Maria Rebecca in an effort to associate her grandfather with the growing conservation movement.

The revisions to Audubon's legacy continued to promote the narrative that Audubon was a necessary step in the replacement of the body of the bird for a painting, in which the bird would become "alive and moving" once again. Butterworth retells a scene from the introduction to the first volume of *Ornithological Biographies*, in which Audubon, as a young boy, first encounters a sense of loss at the death of a bird. In Butterworth's version, the tale goes as follows:

> One day [Audubon] found a live bird of beautiful plumage, and brought it gently to his room with a palpitating heart. The lovely creature charmed him, and he dreamed of it day by day. As he studied it the bird grew more beautiful and he loved it more and more. He awoke early to visit its cage; he fed it often. But the thought of the bird seemed far away among the magnolias or in the rice and cotton fields. Her mate may have been there. The close room and the loving boy were not the open air, the blue, sun-flaming sky, or the brother and sister birds of flower-haunted Louisiana. The little bird pined away notwithstanding the boy's love and care.
>
> Little Audubon found it dead one morning. His heart seemed to stand still; his eyes became suffused with tears.
>
> "My bird, my darling bird! I can not let it go! I will not—it shall not go!"
>
> "But what will you do, my boy?" asked his fond father.
>
> "I will paint it, and it shall live again; it is too beautiful to lose!"
>
> (9-10)

Butterworth's scene works in two ways to link the young boy to his future work, not merely as an ornithologist, but as a sensitive protector of birds. In both the moment of the bird's capture and death, the narrator links the feelings and sentiment of the bird and the boy together. In the line, "One day [Audubon] found a live bird of beautiful plumage, and brought it gently to his room with a palpitating heart," the text is ambiguous as to whose heart is palpitating—the boy's or the bird's. Again at the bird's death, their fates appear intertwined, as young Audubon's heart, too, "seemed to stand still." In Butterworth's version of the tale, it is young Audubon, not his father, who suggests producing an illustration as a way to compensate for the loss of the bird. Given how the passage had tied the bird's fate to Audubon's, the act of painting is presented as a way to not only revitalize the bird, but the young Audubon as well.

Butterworth doesn't deny that Audubon's drawing method eventually relied on his ability to hunt and produce specimens; yet, Butterworth declares, "to kill a bird for science was to him a tragedy, and he shrunk from it" (16). As such, Butterworth emphasizes stories of live capture over hunting: he shows Audubon coming home with live chickadees, or prompting his son Victor to chase after a wild turkey (rather than kill it). Butterworth similarly depicts Audubon making his sketches out in nature, in a "leafy studio," rather than drawing from a dead specimen indoors (26). The children's book ends with an Appendix entitled, "How to Form an Audubon Society." The section opens with the statement: "No bad man is known to have loved birds and to have made them his friends. Friendship with the birds stands for all that is best in life" (220). Whereas Audubon himself argued for the nobility of birds and the luxury commodity value of paintings of birds, here we have an argument that the love of birds is a moral virtue (and

by implication the love of insects or reptiles is not). Having repeatedly demonstrated that Audubon is a friend and protector of the birds, Butterworth numbers him among the most moral men of the age.

The story of Audubon as "the protector of birds" survives through the twentieth century. Alice Ford, in her introduction to *The Bird Biographies of John James Audubon* (1951), continues the tradition of softening Audubon's hunting legacy, writing that she will include no writing that "would offend the squeamish and outrage the conservationist" (ix-x). In a 1990 authorized history of the Audubon Society, historian Frank Graham Jr. acknowledges it may seem perplexing to name the society after the prolific hunter. Yet he counters this skepticism at the appropriateness of the name by insisting that, though Audubon was largely a man of his time, there are moments when he seems to be sounding a warning call against the destruction of woods and the unnecessary killing of birds. And in 2015, Nancy Plain similarly perpetuates the myth of Audubon as an early conservationist, noting, "He was a man of his time and a man ahead of his time—a hunter who could kill a hundred birds in a day and an early environmentalist who worried about the survival of species from birds to buffalo" (Plain 89). These arguments frequently suggest that Audubon's work was motivated by love and care for the birds; he *had* to kill them in order to create his drawings, which would memorialize the birds for eternity. Through the drawings, they could live life again, anew.

Around the time that Audubon societies were beginning to form, at the end of the nineteenth century, a major technological innovation offered yet another way to experience the thrill of "possessing" the beautiful, delicate or fearsome birds encountered in the woods: the camera. From the 1840s until the 1880s, the earliest forms of the

camera still required that the subject remain still for long periods of time: thus, the earliest animal portraits were those of dead or stuffed specimens. Exposure times were long, the equipment was difficult to transport, and developing the photograph needed to be done very quickly after the exposure. Yet by 1890s, as Matthew Brower notes in *Developing Animals* (2011), "the portability and instantaneity of photographic technology were sufficiently developed to allow the photographing of live animals in nature to become a regular accomplishment" (xvi).

In addition to the dynamic natural history print characteristic of Audubon's style, nature photography provided yet another way to capture the animals as they really were, in Audubon's words, "alive and moving." Central to Brower's argument is his claim that nature photography presents animals in such a way that makes them appear "more real" (Brower adds, "more animal,") than the animals that regularly populate domestic spaces, or are otherwise "encountered in daily life" (xvii). The photograph of the animal, captured in nature, appears more animalistic—more wild—and contributes to what Brower describes as an American "preference for the image over the [wild] animal" (xvii-xix).

In his book, Brower locates the preference for the image of the animal over the body of the specimen at the moment of the rise of animal photography. But as I've been trying to show over the course of this chapter, that preference predates photography's advent, and can be found in the writings and drawings of Audubon. And, more related to the current recreation-oriented environmental conservation movement, that the founding of conservation clubs corresponded in time with the advent of nature photography makes Audubon a plausible mascot for avian conservation societies, and, perhaps, less

paradoxical than many would believe today. Audubon's emphasis on the value and primacy of the image over the body of the specimen made him a likely figure for ornithological conservation at the moment that such groups emerged. Furthermore, I suggest that Audubon's presentation of birds and bird imagery as art contributed the ontological framework that Brower identifies in late nineteenth-century nature photography.

As Brower acknowledges, "the development of camera hunting is not accounted for simply by the technological development of photography" (27). That is, the preference for the image of the animal over the animal itself does not come from the technological advancement alone. In early nature photography, the image of the animal had a similar cultural and commodity value as the "trophy" of a hunter's successful outing. This transformation was spurred on by a series of articles by George Bird Grinnell, who was, as I've already mentioned, the founder of the first Audubon society. Grinnell first used the term "camera hunting" in the popular game magazine, *Forest and Stream*, in 1892. Grinnell had been influenced by an article that promoted the idea of "gunless hunting" in order to help preserve wild and threatened animal populations. However, Grinnell acknowledged that the notion of hunting without a prize would seem unappealing to many. "Most of us are formed of very common clay, and we want to bring back something tangible, something that others can see, and touch, and talk about," he writes (427). As Brower explains, "the camera hunters circulated and displayed their images as hunting trophies; the photographs connected photographer and animal and stood as a monument to the photographer's prowess" (26), much as Audubon had argued about his drawings "from nature." (In a felicitous symmetry, *Forest and Stream* produced

the first reproduction of Audubon's prints in the US, through the use of photography in 1896).[39]

For those aligned with the early Audubon society, camera hunting seemed like a natural extension from Audubon's work. As Butterworth wrote in his appendix to his children's literature on Audubon, "A generation ago a man who would paint a bird must sacrifice the life of the bird. The camera has now made this shutting out of the life of a bird unnecessary" (220). This adaptation allowed for the continuation of bird tracking as a competitive sport in which spoils could be measured and compared against those of others—camera hunting was not a mere hobby or pastime, but a pursuit where bragging rights were at stake.

Those arguing in support of camera hunting also claimed that the pursuit was only suitable or understandable to those of refined taste and culture—a claim similar to Audubon's argument for his images over the work of taxidermists of his day. In another popular outdoor magazine of the age, *Outing*, Frank M. Chapman penned an editorial on the merits of hunting with a camera instead of a gun. Chapman writes,

> We return to the question whether a photograph of a wild animal in nature is not more desirable than the body of the same animal in death. Experience leads me to say that to every hunter but a market hunter, or a novice who has never killed the animal pictured, the photograph would be considered the more preferable of the two. No one regards a satisfactory picture of an animal in nature with more interest and enthusiasm than a sportsman. He not only appreciates the difficulties under which it was

[39] Fries, 368.

> secured, but it appeals to him as a picture, as the best possible substitute for nature itself. (256)

Only a crude market hunter, that is, someone out for a profit, or a novice would prefer the body of the specimen over the photograph, Chapman argues. In doing so, Chapman attempts to elevate the image of the bird as something other than a commodity.

Recent scholars see camera hunting and later bird-watching lists as a natural progression from the time of Audubon. Nancy Plain observes, "For the twenty-first-century naturalist, bird watching has replaced shooting, and photography provides the close-ups that John James Audubon craved. The mission has evolved." (90)

Yet, no matter Chapman's argument, the presentation of bird photographs as literal hunting trophies is also in keeping with the commodification of birds and bird imagery that Audubon's prints and passages made possible. Audubon attempted to convinced his readers (and would be subscriber/patrons) that his images would be more valuable to them than specimens, not only from and ornithological standpoint, but from an aesthetic and cultural one as well. American literature scholar David Mazel, however, identifies Audubon's *Birds of America* as a force in the increasing commoditization of nature, in which specimens are presented as "object[s] directly exchangeable for, and thus commensurate with, other objects in the marketplace" (63). According to Mazel, Audubon's work as an artist was a natural extension from his earlier work as a merchant, sawmill owner and taxidermist. In her book *Transporting Visions*, Jennifer Roberts also argues that Audubon's prior (and failed) career as a trader most influenced his approach to the *Birds of America* project. She writes, "I argue that he treated the practice of representation as a material transposition rather than an optical or a conceptual

transformation, a commitment he developed after failing as a merchant-importer in the Ohio River Valley" (6). In other words, Roberts sees the images within *Birds of America* as replacements for bird specimens themselves: the images are primarily commodities, items for trade.

The legacy of this commodification of nature is still evident in outdoor recreation community today. In magazine articles and books within the outdoor recreation industry, natural spaces are referred to as "playgrounds": spaces cornered off for the pleasure of man. By promoting ornithology as a "journey of pleasure," in which the sight of a bird, whether though a sighting or an image, was a trophy, commodity or fetish to enjoy, Audubon's tour-guide outlook fits well with the leisure aspect of the recreational adventurer and explorer, traversing the rough edges of contemporary wilderness.

CHAPTER III

ARCHITECTS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS: THE SOUTHERN TRAVELS OF FREDERICK LAW OLMSTED AND JOHN MUIR

In 1864 the landscape architect and Central Park designer Frederick Law Olmsted visited the Yosemite Valley. Amid the glimmering streams and formidable stone walls, Olmsted was charmed by what appeared to him a perfect harmony of the aesthetics of beautiful and the sublime. "Following up the ravines," he observed, "cabinet pictures open at every turn, which […] constantly recall the most valued sketches of Calame [a Swiss landscape painter] the Alps and Apennines." Gentle meadows, arrayed with tufts of flowers and fringed with dripping springs, provided exciting contrast with a backdrop of far-off mountain summits and sparkling granite ridges all saturated in a rich, golden light. In an article for a New York newspaper, Olmsted appealed to the popular practice of picturesque tourism, which encouraged travel to aesthetically pleasing sights around the nation: an emblematic activity of the middle and leisure class. The enthusiasm for picturesque was not only fed by promoting travel to tourist destinations, but by the circulation of essays and pictures that guided the readers' understanding of the aesthetic and how to find it. Twenty years after Olmsted's glowing report on the virtues of Yosemite, John Muir published the illustrated volume *Picturesque California*, allowing readers to consume scenes of the Yosemite "wilderness" without leaving their armchairs.

The legacies of these two conservation designers differ in many significant ways. Olmsted is often associated with genteel, urban parks. Though he worked primarily in Northern cities and with elites, Olmsted is largely remembered today as the "father," "founder," or "pioneer" of American landscape architecture (Martin 1; Roper xiii) for his

designs of New York's Central Park and several other urban parks and academic campuses across the nation. At the height of his fame in 1893, Olmsted was the "foremost artist which the New World has yet produced," according to an article, "Landscape Art in Public Parks" published in *Garden and Forest* (192). Generations of Americans, the journal gushed, "will find rest and refreshment in the contemplation of smiling landscapes which he has made"; no other American "has made a more valuable and lasting in contribution to civilization in this country" (qtd. in Roper xv). In contrast, Muir is more frequently associated with "wilderness," not built environments. Environmental philosopher Max Oelschlaeger refers to Muir as "the father of the American conservation (now preservation) movement" (172). Ecocritic Paul Outka echoes these remarks in his introduction to Muir in *Race and Nature*: "Save perhaps Thoreau, no figure in nineteenth-century American literature is more closely associated with the sublime embrace of the American landscape" (155). But the authors' descriptions of landscapes they found dirty and dreary are as instructive as those they found salubrious and pleasing. As architects of environmental aesthetics, Muir and Olmsted embraced the picturesque as an aesthetic of detached observation: the most ennobling landscapes are those that preserve a distinct, visual separation of subject and the environment, as opposed to those where the dense foliage drowns out the sun, and the smell of wet earth presses too closely. For both men, the aesthetic of sublime vistas, as exemplified by Yosemite, was nurtured by their experiences with very different natural and social environments in the American Southeast. As a newspaper correspondent traveling through the antebellum South, Olmsted routinely described lands as "dirty,"

"neglected," or "forlorn." Following the war, Muir's encounters with swamps failed to move him to rapturous notes of the wilderness sublime.

So whereas Muir and Olmsted left contrasting legacies in American environmental history and aesthetics, these legacies sprang from familiar origins. Yet scholarly reinterpretations of the work of both Olmsted and Muir remain diverse, casting them as emblematic of radical environmentalism or conservative thinking. Olmsted biographer Justin Martin suggests that Olmsted was a visionary environmentalist who "played a key early role in the conservation of America's wild spaces" (268). Similarly, George Scheper suggests that Olmsted's urban parks defied centuries of thinking about the domination of the wild in favor of a "radical[ism]" in the idea of "nature as a moral teacher" (374, 375) In contrast, David Mazel observes in *American Literary Environmentalism* (2001) that the works of the landscape architect reflect an "elitist and racist teleology" (116). Readings of Muir's work reflect similar poles. In *The Idea of Wilderness* (1991) Oelschlaeger suggests reinterpreting his journals and books as critiques of anthropocentrism that instead offer an embrace of a "biocentric perspective on wild nature" (173), whereas Steven Holmes, Outka, and Stephanie LeMenager observe a racial anxiety in Muir's writing about the wilderness. Yet despite claims that Olmsted and Muir have done more than anyone to "implement and realize the romantic/transcendentalist creed of nature by making charming and salubrious rural scenery accessible," the two figures are rarely discussed together (Scheper 374).

In some of their earliest writings, these two architects of natural aesthetics made similar judgments, often framing scenery in terms of the picturesque: a move that emphasizes the characteristics of the object more than the emotional state it elicits from

the viewer; the picturesque leaves the viewer in quiet satisfaction, whereas the sublime inspires fear and awe in the viewer.[40] By the mid-nineteenth century, art historian John Conron observes, the category of the picturesque enfolded both beauty and sublimity as experiences directed by the visual. In this paper, I demonstrate how the natural aesthetics of Olmsted and Muir emerged from an interrelated network of ideas that include an evolution in taste for picturesque landscapes, ideas about nature as an agent of moral reform, and the growth of the sanitation movement in the mid-nineteenth century. Focusing on their earliest writings, I trace the lineage of these ideas from Olmsted's antebellum travels in *The Cotton Kingdom* and his role as a commissioner for Yosemite state park (1864-1866), to Muir's botanical tour of the South and his first arrival in the Sierra Nevada of California (1867-68). In their travels, both participated in a long-standing tradition of constructing low-lands and highlands, wetlands and mountains, as geographic and aesthetic extremes. While the cultural conditions of the South that Olmsted and Muir visited, respectively, were greatly different (Olmsted in the antebellum era, and Muir post-slavery), their observations on the landscape bear many similarities. The further they travel from their homes in the North, the more strange and unfamiliar the landscape appears. The authors report feeling increasingly isolated as they travel South, especially in the low-lying woodlands, where they frequently fail to find scenes that mark the land as aesthetically valuable. Foregrounded in an embrace of the picturesque aesthetic, their writings display a "tyranny of the visual" that is still at work in environmental conservation campaigns and the media of the outdoor recreation industry today.

[40] See further Carlson, 139.

Olmsted in the Old South

In the winter of 1852, Olmsted took leave from managing his Connecticut farm and set out on a tour of the southern slave states as a correspondent for the *New-York Daily Times*, determined to chronicle the character of the South, its culture and landscapes, with "candor and fidelity" (qtd. Cox 142). Harriet Beecher Stowe's best-selling novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been published earlier that year and offered a stirring argument for abolition on moral grounds. Olmsted sought to provide an unsentimental corollary to Stowe's influential novel: in a missive to Fred Kingsbury, Olmsted wrote that he intended to create an objective portrait of the South, describing "matter[s] of fact" in contrast to popular Northern writers' "spoony fancy pictures."[41] Unlike a number of his Northern friends and associates, Olmsted wasn't an abolitionist; rather, he was known as a gradualist: someone who objected to slavery on moral grounds, but felt that African Americans needed first to be educated and taught how to live freely before freedom was granted. Olmsted's letters on the South ran in the *Times* from February 1853 to February 1854. In many letters, Olmsted evaluated slavery as an economic system, which he often found wanting. The author later expanded the reports into three volumes, totaling more than 1700 pages: *A Journey in the Seaboard Slave States* (1856); *A Journey Through Texas* (1857); and *A Journey in the Back Country* (1860). The three volumes were later condensed into a single book under the title *The Cotton Kingdom*, released in both England and the US in 1861. His most popular and best-selling work of this era, *The Cotton Kingdom* enjoyed the reputation (in the North

[41] Olmsted letter to Frank Kingsbury, 1852, as quoted in Marsh, 78.

and abroad) of presenting an unbiased account of the culture and economy of the plantation states.[42]

In his introduction to *The Cotton Kingdom*, Olmsted imagines that the geography of the United States, from the White Mountains of New England to the southern Appalachians, elicits a natural unity between the northern and southern regions. "The mountain ranges, the valleys, and the great waters of America, all trend north and south, not east and west," Olmsted muses (3). In reference to the 36º30' line of the 1820 Missouri Compromise, which separated the free and slave states, Olmsted remarked, "An arbitrary political line may divide the north part from the south part, but there is no such line in nature: there can be none, socially."[43] Writing the new introduction to his book on the brink of the Civil War, Olmsted offered a Unionist argument that framed the cultural and economical divide between the North and South as contradictory to the laws of nature: "While water runs downhill, the currents and counter currents of trade, of love, of consanguinity, and fellowship, will flow north and south" (3). Yet the two distinct economies—the democratic, free market of the North and the feudal "kingdom" of the South—Olmsted observes in his travels, encourage divisions in culture, manners and taste.

Olmsted estimates that he traveled over three-thousand miles in his tour of the Southern states. During that time, he writes, "for every mile of road-side upon which I saw any evidence of cotton production, I am sure that I saw a hundred of forest or waste

[42] At the time of its publication in the North, according to the editor Artur Schleissinger, Olmsted's writing was nigh-universally praised by his peers, who described his writing as "'temperate,' singularly fair,' 'impartial,' 'dispassionate,' 'unbiased,' 'conciliatory,' [and] 'authentic,'" Olmsted xlvi, footnote 5.

[43] Olmsted's line reflects the phrase from Thoreau's 1854 speech, "Slavery in Massachusetts," in which he writes that there is no Missouri Compromise in nature.

land, with only now and then an acre or two of poor corn half smothered in weeds" (12). Olmsted's use of the term "waste land" echoes with the Lockian theory of property outlined in the *Second Treatise on Government*. Locke offers two definitions for waste land: first, there are areas "left wholly to Nature, that hath no improvement of Pasturage, Tillage or Planting," and, second, according to the labor theory of property, lands that have been "neglected" or whose soil has been poorly managed (qtd. Arneil 142). As Barbara Arneil explains, wasteland is an antonym for cultivated, enclosed land (142). With only one percent of the Southern territory claimed by cotton production and even less by growing corn, Olmsted notes that most of the South is still open, unimproved territory: "There are millions of acres of land yet untouched, which if leveed and drained and fenced, and well cultivated, might be made to produce with good luck seven or more bales [of cotton] to the hand" (15). Olmsted thought of himself as a "scientific farmer." He owned a working farm in Staten Island, and from his experience believed that the South could be made into a wealthy territory. But in places like Virginia, Olmsted believed that, after two centuries of colonial rule, the state remained in "an essentially frontier condition of society" (67). Furthermore, Olmsted suggested, the regions "where slavery has existed the longest" were returning to a state of nature. Animal populations were flourishing, and "forests and marshes" were growing, where communal infrastructure and social institutions, "bridges, schools, churches and shops" were decreasing. "The habits of the people correspond," he concludes (67). To Olmsted, the state of the land reflected the state of society.

While Olmsted observed that the economic system of the south was to blame for what he felt was the poor condition of society, his observations resonated with a long-

standing debate about the American landscape and degeneracy. Writing of the American environment in the mid eighteenth century, French natural philosopher Comte de Buffon suggested that the climate was to blame for its general "degeneracy": that an atmosphere of humidity and general wetness made American mammals smaller and therefore less grand than their European counterparts. The "New Continent" had emerged later than Europe from the oceans, Buffon theorized, such that the American colonies were wetter and more humid. There were more marshes in America, Buffon presumed, and these "stagnating waters" combined with "dense herbage" to create a miasmic atmosphere in much of the country, where "every thing languishes [and] corrupt" (336-7). Densely vegetated regions of the continent, Buffon suggested, were unhealthy and "melancholy," dark and gloomy. As Lee Dugatkin puts it, Buffon claimed that America "was a land of swamps, where life putrefies and rots" (ix). In *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Thomas Jefferson famously refuted Buffon's American degeneracy thesis by describing the vast size of various plants and animals to be found on the continent. Jefferson also defended the aesthetic quality of American scenery, suggesting that the view of the Potomac river meandering through the Blue Ridge mountains was "perhaps one of the most stupendous scenes in nature" (48).

His defenses of American scenery, like many others of the time, concentrated on views of grandeur as well as upon large quadrupeds: two things that would refute Buffon's claims. Jefferson ordered friends in New England to shoot a moose, hoping to deliver a stuffed specimen to Buffon in Paris. The association of American aesthetics with the products and landscapes of New England and the West perpetuated the idea that

American exceptionalism was most visible in these regions, in contrast to the wetland landscape the Buffon had claimed was emblematic of the entire continent.

In fact, the term "swamp" had originated in the North American colonies in the eighteenth century, and swamplands were still intimately connected with ideas about the origins of disease into the nineteenth century. Although by 1855, as Megan Kate Nelson points out in "The Landscapes of Disease," the contagion (person-to-person) theory of disease transmission had gained some scientific credulity and acceptance in the North, many Southern physicians still upheld the miasma theory of infection, in which sour-smelling particles that emerged from decomposing animals and vegetable matter made the air itself infectious. Humid wetlands that fostered decomposition, such as swamps and rice fields, were seen as the local origins of malaria and yellow fever in communities. While in the North, the last yellow fever outbreak had occurred in 1822, cities in the South continued to suffer waves of loss from the disease well into 1880. Draining wetlands was not only useful for transforming wastelands into cultivatable plots, but it also became a matter of public health. At the same time, many white Southerners believed that black people were resistant to diseases caused by exposure to airy excretions of miasma. Apologists for slavery argued that that black peoples' immunity to malaria and other miasma-caused diseases was evidence that they were naturally suited to environments of slave labor. In his tour of a rice plantation in North Carolina, Olmsted wrote, "During the malarious season […] it is dangerous for any but negroes to remain during the night in the vicinity or rice fields" (182-3). But he also questioned this Southern plantation "wisdom": "The negroes do not enjoy as good health on rice plantations as elsewhere," he observes, "and the greater difficulty with which their lives

are preserved, through infancy especially, shows that the subtle poison of the miasma is not innocuous to them" (183).

As Olmsted travels further South, the symbolism and cultural significance of the swamp becomes increasingly dark and violent. Toward the beginning of his travels in Virginia, Olmsted meets with an unnamed farmer who only employed free labor to cultivate his farm. His decision, he explains, is both moral and economic, influenced by the alternative that the nearby swamp landscape provides to the slave who doesn't want to work. The farmer describes the swamp as a refuge for the overworked slave: "[W]hen the slave, thinking he is worked too hard, or being angered by punishment or unkind treatment, 'getting the sulks,' takes to 'the swamp,' and comes back when he has a mind to" (75). Olmsted continually refers to "the swamp" in quotation marks in this section of the text in order to direct the reader's attention to the fact that the term did not refer exclusively to marshlands or wetlands, but could signify any low-lying areas where water could collect and make the ground moist, or any out-of-the-way place a slave could hide (a marronage). The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes an instance of the term "swamp" from 1766 that indicates that the word originated in North America, and was used to refer to "a tract of land that is sound and good, but by lying low is covered by water," and that all "forest trees (pine excepted) thrive best in the swamps, where the soil is always rich." Throughout *The Cotton Kingdom*, "swamp" may simply denote low-lying woodland; however, the term also acquires a racialized association as Olmsted's journeys continue.

Closer to the Northern border, the swamp appears as a feasible alternative to life on the plantation: the slave may "take to" the swamp when he chooses; he may "get all the corn, or almost anything else he wants," and is free to return when he wants. The

farmer reports that he has seen fires from fugitives cooking in the woods, and opines that slaves live there in great freedom and wait to return when the harvest season ends. When a slave does return, the farmer suggests, "his owner, who, glad to find his property safe, and that it has not died in the swamp, or gone to Canada, forgets to punish him" (75). In Olmsted's paraphrase, the region of the swamp and the country of Canada share a similar feature: they are spaces where the slave transforms in the grammar of the sentence from a "him" to an "it." The swamp, like Canada, appears beyond the reach of the slaveholder and the fugitive slave law: an idealized space of black freedom. Of course, the image of the pastoral swamp appears from the perspective of the white farmer, who assures Olmsted that slaves are "very difficult to find" in the swamp, as if being a fugitive wasn't all that dangerous or frightening.

Upon his first foray in a swamp in northern Carolina, Olmsted describes the area in fairly journalistic, descriptive terms, noting colors, textures, and species present. Yet Olmsted also observes that the area of the swamp appears "scarcely passable" on either foot or horseback. He mentions that he has heard the area contains lots of game (bear, cats, raccoons, opossums, deer). The fishing, Olmsted has also been told, is "said to be excellent" (113). The swamps in this region, Olmsted remarks, are "noted places of refuge for runaway negroes." However, the association with freedom Mr. W. talked of in the Virginia swamps has dissipated: Olmsted notes that, since the Carolinians employ dogs to chase runaway slaves, the fugitive population has decreased, although some children continue to be born and raised in the swamp. Olmsted reflects: "What a life it must be! Born outlaws; … trained from infancy to be constantly in dread of the approach of a white man as a thing more fearful than wildcats or serpents, or even starvation"

(121). As Gwendolyn Midlo Hall remarks in *Africans in Colonial Louisiana*, "Runaway slaves hid out for weeks, months, and even years on or behind their masters' estates without being detected or apprehended" in the ciprières or cypress swamps (203). To Olmsted, however, life in these woods appears topsy-turvy: it is impossible for him to imagine an existence in which the face of a white man appears more dangerous than beasts and more worrisome than running out of food.

Outside of areas where there is a clear marsh or wetlands, the term "swamp" is used to denote a scrap of land outside the main plantation or overseer's house, often near the slave dwellings. Olmsted makes reference to a slave going to "the swamp" to harvest wood to warm his cabin on the weekend. When Olmsted finally is forced to travel for long distances through "the swamp" in his travels in eastern Texas, he describes it as a dangerous country, full of traps waiting to ensnare the unsuspecting traveler:

> The many pools, through which the usual track took us, were swarming with venomous water-snakes, four or five black moccasins often lifting at once their devilish heads above the dirty surface, and wriggling about our horses' heels. Beyond the Sabine, alligator holes are an additional excitement, the unsuspicious traveler suddenly sinking through the treacherous surface, and sometimes falling a victim, horse and all, to the hideous jaws of the reptile, while overwhelmed by the engulfing mire in which he lurks. (311)

"Devilish," "treacherous," and "hideous," the environment appears so inhospitable to outsiders that, Olmsted speculates, the entrance to hell might be found there: "In fact if the nether regions […] be 'a boggy country,' the avernal entrance might, I should think,

with good probabilities, be looked for in this region" (311). Olmsted's descriptions of the uses and appearance of the swamp work to construct a picture of the region as wholly wild, confounding and inhospitable to whites.

Throughout the text, Olmsted maintains that intimacy with the wrong kind of nature has a corrupting influence on moral character, and he shares the concerns of white plantation owners that, should slavery come to an abrupt end, not only would the white population be in danger of retaliation, but that the institution of democracy itself would be compromised. Samples from across the text display how the narrator collapses black people and landscapes that he finds unseemly. In Virginia, he describes: "very dull, idiotic, and brute like" and "disgustingly dirty," "little better than a cunning idiot, and a cowed savage" (32, 33); in the Carolinas, "clumsy, awkward, gross, elephantine," "revolting," "excessively dirty, slovenly dressed" (162, 166); in the rice district, "repulsive," "uncouth, cumbrous" (190). On the whole, Olmsted remarks, "it requires an effort to appreciate that [Africans] are, very much more than the beasts they drive, our brethren—a part of ourselves" (32). To insure the safety of the white inhabitants, and the health of community and democracy, Olmsted advocates that the enslaved populations be "taught how to use their freedom"; in other words, to be "civilized," disciplined and educated before they are made free.

In many instances, Olmsted uses the state of the land as part of his argument to demonstrate that the slavery system abuses the landscape just as much as it erodes or prohibits the growth of a civilized society. Over the course of his travels, Olmsted finds that the South offers few opportunities for a pastoral or picturesque encounter. In his article, "Transcending Journalism: Olmsted's Style in *The Cotton Kingdom*," Robert

Detweiler notices the lack of landscape scenery in the text of the *Cotton Kingdom*, and speculates that Olmsted "found human conditions too absorbing to devote much space to the inanimate beauties of Nature" (78). Yet given Olmsted's devotion to scenery even before his career as a landscape architect began, all his descriptions of the environment are significant. One pastoral encounter stands out: on a plantation of a wealthy slave owner in North Carolina. On this "farm," Olmsted suggests that the beauty of the landscape reflects the order and cleanliness of its inhabitants: "buds were swelling on a jessamine-vine… sparrows were chirping, doves cooing," at the same time that "clean and neatly-dressed negroes grooming thorough-bred horses, which pawed the ground, and tossed their heads..." (178). Later, while admiring a row of old-growth live-oak trees, Olmsted reflects, "I thought of old Kit North's rhapsody on trees; and it was no rhapsody—it was all here, and real: 'Light, shade, shelter, coolness, freshness, music, dew, and dreams dropping through their umbrageous twilight—dropping direct, soft, sweet, soothing, and restorative from heaven.' Alas! no angels; only little black babies toddling about" (182). As an enslaved man approaches Olmsted to take his horse to the stable for the night, Olmsted reflects he is "glad" to have "stumbled into so charming a place" (182).

The illusion of pastoral innocence doesn't last long, however. This particular scene, Olmsted informs the reader, is a "show plantation": a kind of institution reserved for the enjoyment of a private elite that serves tours to wealthy Northerners. In a rare instance, Olmsted brings up the moral argument against slavery: the seemingly pastoral nature of the farm isn't actually picturesque at all, it is artificial fakery, a "show." This isn't the only time that Olmsted exposes the image of the South as hospitable and genteel,

as advanced by apologists of slavery, as a fake. The persistent, particular discomfort of the narrator characterizes much of *The Cotton Kingdom*. The sources of Olmsted's various distresses range from poor food to dirty lodgings, as well as his difficulties understanding how to move in the landscape. Inhospitality seems to mark the southern homes Olmsted visits: not only do his hosts demand compensation for putting him and his horse up for an evening, but their accommodations are often far below Olmsted's threshold of comfort. Olmsted documents a singular instance in which a host hesitated to charge him for the meager provisions provided, and this interaction did not take place until he was well into his trip in the Mississippi interior cotton districts (381). Olmsted frequently records the number of hours between when he arrives at a resting place for then night and when a servant starts the fire in his room: generally, these hours are too many to suit his preference (125). Large plantations and wealthy slave owners generally appear as the worst hosts of all, Olmsted suggests, fracturing the image of warm, genuine Southern hospitality.

Not only are plantation spaces artificial symbols of wealth and culture, but towns are as well. Upon his first glimpse of Richmond, Virginia from afar, Olmsted notes that the city came into view while he was traveling on horseback:

> Richmond, at a glance from adjacent high ground, through a dull cloud of bituminous smoke, upon a lowering winter's day, has a very picturesque appearance, and I was reminded of the sensation produced by a similar *coup d'oeil* of Edinburgh. It is somewhat similarly situated upon and among some considerable hills; but the moment it is examined at all in detail, there is but one spot, in the whole picture upon which the eye is at

all attracted to rest. (40-41)

Olmsted's efforts to glimpse the town through a picturesque frame require requires that several conditions be met. If glimpsed from the the right angle ("at a glance from adjacent high ground"), and in the proper atmospheric conditions ("through a dull cloud…upon a lowering winter's day"); then the cityscape might have aesthetic value, or "a very picturesque appearance." But any attempt to survey the scene with more than a "glance," for more than a "moment," will lead to disappointment, excepting one spot: the Capitol building.

In his aesthetic evaluation, Olmsted draws from the language of William Gilpin and Uvedale Price, who helped formalize the category of the picturesque in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Gilpin described the picturesque primarily as a quality for judging landscape painting: well-executed paintings contained elements of "roughness" and "irregularity" (6). But Gilpin falls short of providing an explanation for why certain natural scenes are admirable, or suitable to be painted, in the first place. Yet as Walter Hipple observes, "Gilpin finds objects of art less capable of arousing enthusiasm than the works of nature. The picturesque traveler, in fact, is apt to acquire some contempt for the haunts of man, which have so often a poor effect on the landscape" (198). In landscape painting, John Conron explains in *American Picturesque*, the aesthetic sought "unity" between the "local and the distant" and "the general and the indefinite" (68). In his essay "On Picturesque Beauty" (1792), Gilpin defines the picturesque as that which is "associated with the roughness and irregularity of nature harmonized by composition" (26). As landscape historian Mavis Batey observes, aristocratic landscape design informed the earliest writings on the picturesque,

particularly, the desire to craft an aesthetic that could be used to make estate gardens beautiful and pleasing. The goal of the landscape artist, then, was to create not just single views found in painterly compositions, but to construct landscapes that were appealing from several angles. Additionally, Olmsted thought that landscape design should maintain an organic appearance, so as not to seem artificial. Nature itself, Olmsted wrote, was "harmonizing, refining …an influence favorable to courtesy, self-control and temperance" (qtd. in Olmsted, "Public Parks" 385).

During his travels South, Olmsted wrote a letter that first appeared in the *Times,* elaborating on his notion that organized spaces for viewing nature, such as parks and gardens, could potentially serve as a tool for moral reform:

> Thus, I think, with a necessity for scarcely any additional governmental offices, or increase of the friction of governmental machinery, might be encouraged and sustained, at points so frequent and convenient that they would exert an elevating influence upon all the people, public parks and gardens, galleries of art and instruction in art, music, athletic sports and healthful recreations, and other means of cultivating taste and lessening that excessive materialism of purpose in which we are, as a people, so cursedly absorbed. (Appendix; Papers 2:244)

Amid several institutions for cultural refinement, Olmsted lists "gardens and parks" as having the power to "exert an elevating influence" and as a "means of cultivating taste"; in other words, having a civilizing influence on communities.

Olmsted's belief in the reciprocal nature of environment and society remains an important theme in the text. In the Carolinas, Olmsted observes that the capitol building

in Raleigh has been situated on a plot of land that "could easily be made into an appropriate and beautiful little park." That it isn't is an act of "singular negligence." Adding insult to injury, not only does the space "remained in a rude state of undressed nature," he wrote, it was "used as a hog-pasture" (134). In Mobile, Alabama, Olmsted describes his environs as "compactly built, dirty, and noisy, with little elegance, or evidence of taste or public spirit." Once again, a space for a nice park presents itself: "a small, central, open square—the only public ground that I saw"; but it, too, "was used as a horse and hog pasture, and clothes-drying yard" (219).

At the time of Olmsted's travels South, as his biographer Laura Wood Roper notes, there were no large, natural parks in any city in the US; the nearest thing to public parks were the public commons and cemeteries. In 1844 William Cullen Bryant published an editorial advocating for the creation of a public outdoor commons, much like the Champs-Elyse in Paris, to provide New Yorkers with "an extensive pleasure ground for shade and recreation in these sultry afternoons, which we might enjoy without going out of town" (85). Olmsted's travels South occurred simultaneously with increased interest in establishing the first city park in New York.[44] As he worked on revisions of his book manuscript for *Cotton Kingdom*, Olmsted won the bid to direct the Central Park project, narrowly beating out John Woodhouse Audubon and a few other contenders for the job of the superintendent. In the next stage of the park development, the commissioners announced a competition for the park's design, which Olmsted and his

[44] Geographer Yi-Fu Tan observes in *Landscapes of Fear*, urban parks do not retain the same aura of disciplined, sanitized nature. "Paradoxically," he notes, "it is in the large city—the most visible symbol of human rationality and triumph over nature—that some of the old fears remain" (9). The wilderness is no longer only imagined out there, in the periphery, but within the urban "jungle," a "chaos of buildings, streets and fast-moving cars," where "other people" constitute the "greatest threat." This ironic inversion turns Central Park, by day a pastoral space of civilized, social activity (picnicking, jogging) during "open" hours, into a wilderness at night, a refuge for criminalized behaviors.

partner Calvert Vaux won. In a statement about the design of the park, Olmsted noted that unimpeded lines of sight were essential: "The most essential element of park scenery is turf in broad, unbroken fields, because in this the antithesis of the confined spaces of the town is most marked." (qtd. Fisher 81). As Irving Fisher notes in *Frederick Law Olmsted and the City Planning Movement,* the park should first and foremost be a technology that produced "contemplation" that would be "restorative…to the mind" (81).

Olmsted had long finished his travels in and writing about the South by the time that John Muir thought to head into the land of the former Confederacy. At the publication of *Cotton Kingdom*, Olmsted served briefly on the US Sanitary Commission before he took a position as the superintendent of a mining estate in California's Mariposa region. Muir, meanwhile, traveled to Canada during the Civil War. After the war's end, Muir seized the opportunity to take a botanical tour as far south as the Amazon, he had hoped, where he might "become a Humboldt"—Muir's term for the kind of ecologically aware and observant natural history writing that had made Alexander von Humboldt an international celebrity.[45]

Muir's 1000 Mile Walk

During his walk, Muir produced his first journal manuscript, which he intended to revise and publish at the end of his journey. But the journal didn't appear until 1916, two years after Muir's death, in an edition edited by William Frederic Bade, titled *A Thousand-Mile Walk to the Gulf.* In the original journals, conserved in the University of the Pacific library archives, Muir describes his 1867 trek as a "botanical journey studied for years," from Indiana to Florida, in search of *Magnolia grandiflora* and other "glories of… tropical flora" (xi). Muir began studying botany a few years earlier, in 1863, having

[45] Muir wrote this now often repeated phrase in a letter to Jeanne Carr. As qtd. in Cohen, 8.

been introduced to it by a friend, Milton Griswold (*Boyhood*, 280-3). Botany gave Muir's interest in the natural world an intense focus: in a letter to his sister in 1863, Muir noted that botany was "the most exciting thing in the form of even amusement much more of study that I have ever known" (1:290). Although Muir had originally entertained the idea of finishing his travels with a tour on the Amazon river, his 1867 journey only brought him as far south as Cuba. He soon headed to California, where he would famously spend a summer working as a shepherd in the Sierra Nevada mountains. Muir made the Yosemite Valley his home, and would go on to found the Sierra Club and advocate for Yosemite to be recognized as a National Park.

Given the proximity of his tour of the southern states to his journey to California, readers often interpret *A Thousand-Mile Walk* as a foundational text in Muir's developing wilderness ethic. Oelschlaeger writes that "Muir's idea of wilderness … pivots" on this journey (180), while Michael P. Cohen argues that an episode in which Muir camped out in a cemetery outside of Savannah, Georgia "radically transformed" the young environmentalist (18). In *Rediscovering America: John Muir in His Time and Ours*, Frederick W. Turner observes that Muir's writing dissolves the distinctions between men, plants and animals. Turner suggests that this results in an "aboriginal tone" that exemplifies Muir's closeness to nature and establishes his true "home" in the wilderness (142). Meanwhile, environmental philosopher J. Baird Callicott suggests that the text exemplifies a "biologically informed" "wetland aesthetic" that prioritizes biodiversity over traditional notions of beauty (38). Callicott also suggests that Muir appreciated wetlands as landscapes of solitude: "[N]o one else might be found in them. They were wild, untrammeled, unpenetrated by loathsome Homo sapiens, among Nature's several

and secret strongholds" (38). Overwhelmingly, Callicott neglects to mention that some of Muir's most revelatory experiences in the South occur against the backdrop of his feelings of deep discomfort and profound strangeness in the landscape. Though lauded for its biocentric vision, the *Thousand Mile Walk* displays vast discrepancies in ways of looking at and experiencing nature and wilderness: most evident in the poles of the charming, light-suffused, "blessed wilderness" of the Bonaventure cemetery, and the expulsive, "alligator wilderness" of the swamp.

Unsurprisingly Muir found the most delight in the views he encountered in the Cumberland mountains. These distant, sweeping views were from some of the loftiest heights he had yet been able to climb. They also offered broad, expansive views of the landscape below. Muir had intended to use the journey to work on scientific botanical study, he ended up writing more about aesthetics of landscape, which he would continue to do in later travels in the mountains. Though the vistas were not of much use from a botanists' perspective, he nevertheless exclaims about the sights in his journal: "The scenery is far grander than any I ever before beheld…. Such an ocean of wooded, waving, swelling mountain beauty is not to be described…. Oh, these forest gardens of our father! What perfection, what divinity, in their architecture!" (38-9). At the same time, Muir uses picturesque language to describe these long, distant views: the eye possesses that which it sees, rather than being possessed by it. This point is clear when Muir uses identical sentence structure to describe items he has consumed on a September morning: "Obtained breakfast in a clean house and began the descent of the mountains. Obtained fine views of a wide, open country" (30). Muir's language of possession around

sight continues in the Cumberland mountain region when he again describes obtaining "fine glimpses" and walking to "have" a view (31, 34).

Muir's language of the picturesque, however, begins to collapse as he heads deeper into the closely vegetated forests of the swamp south, which provide no long lines of sight or cascading views. During the first few months of Muir's walk through Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee, he encountered a few unfamiliar plants. But upon reaching the Augusta region of Georgia, what Muir refers to as "the country of […] the so-called 'Long Moss," he begins to feel as though he has finally reached a new, surprising and unfamiliar landscape. Although sixteen years earlier, Olmsted had observed that there was no "line" in nature separating the North from the South, Muir describes encountering a version of this line in the landscape, when the plants become stranger and the local people even less hospitable.

Unlike Olmsted, who intended to report on the social institutions of the South, Muir began his walk intending to follow, he declares, "in a general southward direction by the wildest, leafiest, and least trodden way I could find, promising the greatest extent of virgin forest" (1-2). Yet in his journey, Muir still keeps to many roads and byways, intending to find a meal and shelter at homes, and his interpersonal interactions reveal a racial anxiety in his environmental travels. In the psychobiographical study *The Young John Muir* (1999), Stephen J. Holmes observes that Muir "*became* racist—or, became *white*" as a result of the walk (165). Paul Outka's *Race and Nature* (2008) notes that Muir repeats arguments used by slavery apologists in his depictions of African American people as an "extension of the natural world" (160). And Stephanie LeMenager suggests in a chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Nineteenth Century American Literature* that

Muir "awkwardly, inconsistently refuses to include certain human types, often 'negroes' and poor whites, within the *bios* […] the good life, life possessed of rights and protected by […] the state of Nature" (7). Muir's notes on the social context of his travels operate on a rhetorical level to reflect his reaction to the similarly strange and inhospitable landscape. On September 30, 1867, Muir records that he had walked a full forty miles in one day, searching in vain for a place to rest or eat on his journey toward Augusta, but finding no hospitality from homes along the way. "No family would receive me," he writes. When Muir reaches Augusta, he notes that an African American "kindly directed" him to the "best hotel," where he finally finds a bed. This encounter marks the beginning of Muir's difficulty in finding places to rest and dine for several nights. Muir often looks in at the homes of white farmers to see if they may spare a bed and a meal, but is often turned down or subjected to a "vigorous line of questioning" before such an offer is granted. Muir's social status is clearly established as that of a Northerner, an outsider not to be trusted.

After leaving Augusta, Muir walks along the Savannah River, where he encounters a vast, impenetrable swamp for the first time. Where one might expect that the strange and unfamiliar sight of new trees and plants would delight the roving botanist, the vocabulary of beauty and awe is noticeably absent from his description:

> I found an impenetrable cypress swamp. […] The groves and thickets of smaller trees are full of blooming evergreen vines. These vines are not arranged in separate groups, or in delicate wreaths, but in bossy walls and heavy, bound-like heaps and banks. Am made to feel that I am now in a strange land. I know hardly any of the plants, but few of the birds, and I

> am unable to see the country for the solemn, dark, mysterious cypress woods which cover everything. The winds are full of strange sounds, making one feel far from the people and plants and fruitful fields of home. Night is coming on and I am filled with indescribable loneliness. Felt feverish; bathed in a black, silent stream; nervously watchful for alligators. (57-8)

In Muir's description, the landscape seems to resist his efforts to enter: it is a heavily guarded, "impenetrable" fortress, where the vines form stern barricades, an unknowable place, full of darkness, uncertainty, and mystery. His sense of isolation is even conveyed in the structure of his sentences. For the majority of the narrative, Muir writes in the first person; but, midway through the above quoted passage, he switches from a first-person to a third-person narrator: "The winds are full of strange sounds, making one feel far from the people and plants and fruitful fields of home." The third-person voice completes Muir's sense of alienation and isolation: the landscape feels so strange, his sentence structure shifts in such a way that makes him appear as a stranger, an undistinguished and unnamed, isolated "one," "indescribab[ly] lonely," peering in from the edge of the swamp.

Muir continues to encounter swamps as he treads farther south. In his descriptions of those landscapes, he repeats many of the same adjectives in the above-quoted passage: the swamplands are "impenetrable," "mysterious," and "vast." In many ways, Muir's descriptions appear to have all the ingredients of the classical sublime: swamps are sites of mystery and liquidy strangeness. M. Allewaert suggests that swamps are "quintessentially sublime spaces, because they are vast geographies that defy

measurement" (345). And yet, Muir's encounters with this particular form of wilderness fail to move him to rhapsodic utterances, or exclamations of astonishment so often associated with his ethos. That the swamps Muir encountered were "vast geographies" is certainly well-documented in his text: Muir repeatedly notes the great expanse of the wetland spaces with descriptors such as "immense," "seemingly boundless" and "vast," and large enough to consume an entire day of travel, which, for Muir, could mean up to forty miles in a single day (63, see also, Oct 6 and 7). Further pairing the watery ecology to the aesthetic notion of the sublime, the descriptor Muir most often uses to characterize the swamp is "mysterious." Though Muir reports feeling "nervous" and "feverish" in his first swampy landscape, these moments don't escalate to terror or horror.

Yet his feelings of strangeness and loneliness are thrown into even greater relief by an encounter he has with an African American a few pages later. Muir relates that he and the young man enjoyed "a long talk" about life on the fringes of the watery ecosystem (59). Muir writes that the man knows the landscape well enough to spin an "eloquent narrative of coon hunting, alligators, and many superstitions" (59). That the stranger speaks eloquently of the swamp bespeaks his ability to move elegantly through the landscape. Muir's own failure to do so, then, is amplified by this contrast. Unfamiliar with the land, unable to name the many birds and plants about him, Muir has failed to interpret the landscape. The "eloquent narrative" also changes the space and role that creatures occupy in the wetland landscapes: to Muir, alligators are a source of fear, but to the African American, the alligators are a known quantity of the landscape. In the case of the marrons for fugitive slaves in the South, alligators were part of what protected their refuge in the swamps. Allewaert suggests that swamp spaces failed to produce sublime

experiences for white travelers because the travelers were unable to remain psychologically distinct" from the "sublime objects" (347); in contrast, Muir craves a psychological unity, while his landscape descriptions betray a longing for sunshine and distant lines of sight. Instead, Muir feels most pressingly the limits of his knowledge in the water-logged terrain.

Muir's sense of isolation and loneliness functions as a key prelude to the transformative, week-long stay at the Bonaventure graveyard. In the chapter "Camping among the Tombs," Muir relates that he found himself in need of a place to sleep as he waited in Savannah on a money order from his brother in Wisconsin. As he wanders the outskirts of town in search of a place to rest, Muir reveals that he is more afraid of "idle negroes […] prowling about" than he is of "insects and snakes" (73). Though he is concerned over the potential exposure to malaria, Muir settles for an evening in the Bonaventure graveyard that temporarily appears like a sanctuary, where "no superstitious prowling mischief maker dare venture for fear of haunting ghosts." In contrast, Muir suggests that the graveyard will be a place of "God's rest and peace" (73).

The Bonaventure episode becomes one of the few moments that elicits a sublime aesthetic for Muir in the South. Upon first entering the cemetery, Muir describes Bonaventure in spiritual language: the trees are "beautiful," "grand," "magnificent," "glorious"; the place "one of the Lord's most favored abodes of life and light." The landscape, however, is not without the mystery and strangeness that accompany the sublime: everywhere there are markers of death, and even the moss that hangs in long strips from the trees sways gently in the wind in a manner that seems fitting to a "solemn

funeral" (68). In the characteristic discourse of the sublime, Muir says, "I gazed awe-stricken as one new-arrived from another world" (69).

The episode in the Bonaventure graveyard marks the only time throughout the entire text of the *Thousand Mile Walk* that Muir uses the term "wilderness" in a positive way to describe a landscape in the South. Not only does Muir describe the Bonaventure landscape as a wilderness, it is a "blessed wilderness." But Muir's use of the term here is peculiar, as the landscape is far from untrammeled. The cemetery was originally the site of the large Bonaventure plantation, founded in the 1760s (Bonaventure Historical Society). The owner, an Englishman John Mullryne, ordered that live oak trees be planted at fifteen-foot intervals along an avenue on the 600-acre site. Muir was not the first to remark on the beauties of the Bonaventure site. In 1842 Henry R Jackson's ballad "Buonaventure by Star-light" appeared in the Georgian literary magazine *The Orion*, describing the "sacred music" that seems to emanate from the oak and moss-draped grounds surrounding the famous Tatnall's tomb. In an Editor's Note to the poem, William Carey Richards suggested that the orderly landscape be transformed from a private cemetery to a public burial ground:

> This beautiful spot is situated upon the Savannah river, about four miles below the metropolis of Georgia. Its attraction consists in magnificent natural *corridors*—as our esteemed correspondent has gracefully expressed it—over which are interlaced the branches of glorious old trees, hung with the long gray moss peculiar to southern latitudes. These passages are of considerable extent and radiate from a common centre, whence the visiter [sic] commands, through one of the sublime vistas, a

> view of the Savannah flushing onward to the sea. The effect of the whole scene is always exceedingly impressive…. It has often occurred to us, that this interesting spot would make an admirable cemetery for the adjacent city, and we have wondered why it has not been thus appropriated. Boston has her Mount Auburn, Paris her Pere la Chaise, and Savannah may have her Buonaventure, which, by position and natural associations, is better fitted for a "Garden of the dead," that either of the former. Tatnall's solitary tomb now rises amid its moss-hung aisles, but hundreds of similar monuments would harmonize sweetly with the silent and almost thrilling grandeur of the place. (44)

Richards' note places the Bonaventure site within the rural cemetery movement, which encouraged setting aside large tracts of land, picturesquely arranged and planted, for burial sites removed from the urban center. City graveyards were becoming overcrowded, and the saturation of burials led to the speculation that densely filled graveyards were breeding grounds for disease. Four years after Richards' editorial note appeared in the *Georgia Magazine*, the mansion at Bonaventure burned down, and the owners decided it no longer seemed financially viable as a plantation. Following Richards' recommendation, the owners by designated seventy acres of the grounds as a garden cemetery and established the Evergreen Burial Company of Bonaventure to oversee the private, burial enterprise. Soon the remains of many notable and wealthy citizens from across Georgia were relocated to the Bonaventure site and adorned with tombs, mausoleums, and commemorative sculptures. As early as 1857, the popular New York

publication D. Appleton published a tour guide, *Appleton's Illustrated Handbook of American Travel* that featured Bonaventure as picturesque travel destination:

> The cemetery … is a wonderful place. It was originally a private estate, laid out in broad avenues, radiating from a central point in all directions. These avenues are now grand forest aisles, lined with live oaks of immense size…. A more beautiful or somber solemn home for the dead than in the shades of these green forest aisles, cannot be well imagined. The endless cypress groves of the 'silent cities' by the Bosphorus, are not more impressive than the intricate web of these still forest walks. (276)

In 1860, the Belgian Romantic artist Henri Cleenewerck painted the Bonaventure grounds, depicting finely dressed aristocratic families wandering among the tombs, obelisks, and paths lined with verdure. Bonaventure remained a private burial ground until 1907, marking it as a space of upper-class retreat and leisure.

At the time of his visit in 1867, Muir was aware that Bonaventure was formerly the residence of a "wealthy gentleman" who had "cultivated and planted [the land] with live-oak" over a century ago. For Muir, these tree-lined, orderly avenues formed "the most conspicuous glory. "Never since I was allowed to walk the woods have I found so impressive a company of trees as the tillandsia-draped oaks of Bonaventure," he remarked (69). The aspects of of the landscape that Muir admires most have been designed by a landscape architect, driven by picturesque aesthetics and concern for urban hygiene that was common to the rural cemetery movement. But he does not comment on these aspects of design as an interference or a sign of the "art" of man. Rather, he objects to the black iron fence posts that enclose part of the grounds: to Muir, the "rigid bars"

appear as though they "might have been spears or bludgeons from a battlefield in Pandemonium" (71). Like Olmsted, Muir reacts negatively to the evidence of overtly artificial landscape design. But his celebration of the oak avenue suggests an implicit approval of the kinds of landscape design that make the grounds appear, ironically, more natural, that is, in harmony with the landscape aesthetics that Muir finds pleasing: height, grandeur, but also containing open spaces to break up the ubiquity of the vegetation and allow the sunlight to stream in.

Muir's description exemplifies how the genius of landscape design may pass into natural history. Muir imagines that "Nature is ever at work to reclaim" the most artificial seeming aspects of the grounds that have been "disordered by art": "It is interesting to observe how assiduously Nature seeks to remedy these *labored art blunders*…. She corrodes the iron and marble, and gradually levels the hill which is always heaped up" (71, emphasis added). In Bonaventure, Muir observes, some element of the wild does exist, making the cultivated plots appear "as if the foot of man had never known them" (68).[46] Only a few signs of natural processes appear: moss creeps over some gravestones, some marble appears to be chipped and crumbling, and some iron fences have rusted. But the iron-guarded perimeter also emerges as a sign of separation in the text: it is these bars that denote the borders of the cemetery and that lead Muir to imagine that he will find safety there from "prowlers." Muir's "wilderness" doesn't need to be wild, or even natural: wilderness can exist in a popular tourist destination—a commercial cemetery—as

[46] This statement bears striking resemblance to the language Muir uses to describe the shore of Lake Tenaya in Yosemite Valley: one of the touchstone sites of Muir's wilderness association in his later work. On the shores of Lake Tenaya, as Rebecca Solnit notes in *Savage Dreams*, Muir wrote that "no foot seems to have neared" the spot where Tenaya and the remaining band of Yosemite Miwok were forced to surrender to Major Savage (Solnit 220). Nature may not bear the marks of human history for long, Muir speculates.

long as the picturesque vision of the imagination is still able to simultaneously obscure and naturalize artifice.

Muir's experience in the artificial, but nevertheless "blessed wilderness" of Bonaventure on the one hand, and in the swamp, or "alligator wilderness" on the other, form two aesthetic and geographic poles (116). For both Muir and Olmsted, the wetlands challenged their notions of the order of nature. Following his exit from Bonaventure, Muir travels once more through the unfamiliar swamp and forest land. Upon entering Florida, Muir is disappointed to discover that the land he has so long visited "in dreams" bears no resemblance to the place itself. Muir had fantasized about "a close forest of trees, every one in flower, and bent down and entangled to network by luxuriant, bright-blooming vines, and over all a flood of bright sunlight" (87), but is disappointed to find, instead, smaller groves, none in bloom, and all of the trees "sunk to the shoulders in sedges and rushes" that make them difficult to approach. "Everything in earth and sky had an impression of strangeness; not a mark of friendly recognition, not a breath not a spirit whisper of sympathy came from anything about me, and of course I was lonely," he comments (88).

When Muir attempts to resort to the observational practice of botany as tool for organizing and classifying the strange landscape, the vines and deep shrubs and grasses frustrate his scientific practice. "Often I was tangled in a labyrinth of armed vines like a fly in a spider-web," he remarks (90). "At all times […] I was overwhelmed with the vastness and unapproachableness of the great guarded sea of sunny plants." Once again, Muir is overwhelmed in the swamp wilderness, yet the experience is not an affirmative moment of the sublime. Small varieties in the landscape appear as Muir walks onward: at

one point, he emerges from “the leafy darkness of the swamp forest” into a “sun-drenched palm garden” (115). But then, even the palm trees disappoint: Linnaeus called them “the princes of the vegetable world”; but Muir describes them as “not very graceful”: he has seen “grasses waving with far more dignity” (116).

In spite of the interesting plants and animals contained within the swampland landscapes, Muir concludes that these spaces weren’t designed to be appreciated or inhabited by men. He speculates, “The deep mysterious gardens of the hot south seem to be made and kept in beauty for other eyes than those of man—he is fenced out by wild beasts and pestilence and countless gathering of armed plants” (Collected Papers, 23:147; qtd. in Holmes 189). Muir’s journey reveals that, ultimately, his affinity for “wilderness” has visual and tactile constraints. The malarial atmosphere and the threat of toothsome or poisonous beasts suggest to Muir that the spectacle is not able to be appreciated from the vantage point of man. The crowded nature of the swamp prevents Muir’s eye from possessing the landscape at a fair distance, as he was able to do from the Cumberland mountaintops. The swamps landscapes, instead, attempt to possess him: “The South has plant fly-catchers. It also has plant man-catchers,” he observes.

Eventually, in Cedar Keys the malaria that Muir had long feared from spending time in the swamps caught up to him. His self-diagnosed illnesses increase, from malarial fever to typhoid and dropsy. After three months of care, he emerges outside once again to contemplate natural scenes, but from a distance: he keeps to the edge of the wood and admires the shores from a sailboat. Muir’s malarial meditations lead to philosophical climax of the book. He begins by observing that illness pervades many of the low-lying regions of the coast. Like Olmsted before him, Muir is skeptical that miasmic illnesses

discriminate on the basis of race: "All the inhabitants of this region, whether black or white, are liable to be prostrated by the ever-present fever and ague, to say nothing of the plagues of cholera and yellow fever that come and go suddenly like storms, prostrating the populations and cutting gaps in it like hurricanes in the woods" (136). The place-based illness theory leads Muir to refute the argument that Nature was made for mankind:

> venomous beasts, thorny plants, and deadly diseases of certain parts of the earth prove that the whole world was not made for [man]. When an animal from a tropical climate is taken to high latitudes, it may perish of cold, and we say that such an animal was never intended for so severe a climate. But when man betakes himself to sickly parts of the tropics and perishes, he cannot see that he was never intended for such deadly climates. (141)

In linking wetlands and "sickly parts" of the world, Muir suggests that they form parts of the landscape where man does not belong. While Oelschleager and Callicott champion this passage as an example of Muir's evolving biocentric philosophy, it also appears to be a revised version of anthropocentrism that suggests that some landscapes aren't meant for man, and yet maintains that other landscapes are. Environments where the land seems to press too closely—the swamps and wetlands—fail to provide opportunities of seeing long panoramic views or picturesque vistas from a privileged summit position.

Long vistas and picturesque scenes elicit the most aesthetic appreciation from Muir. It becomes increasingly clear that Muir dislikes the darker, shadowy and often impenetrable forests and swamps, where noises from unseen sources left him anxious and apprehensive. These scenes demonstrate that the aesthetic of the sublime wilderness is primarily visual. As Gordon Sayre writes, "For all that we may bemoan the fact, [the

American wilderness] is protected and celebrated on an intensive, not an extensive scale, and the long vistas that remain have become picturesque postcard scenes more than sublime experiences" (142).

After a long illness in the Cedar Keys, Muir climbs up onto the rooftop of his Florida residence, and his rhetoric suggests a link between the purity of the visual and the internal. At last, at a small height above the busy city, he is able to once again possess a picturesque view of the landscape, where long lines of sight enable a sense of destiny and rightness in the "land of flowers" (143). The preference for long, distant views and avoidance of crowded, claustrophobic spaces follows Muir from the country to the city, when Muir arrives in New York City, and waits to catch the ship heading for California. For ten days, Muir stays at the harbor, loathe to journey out of sight of the ship:

> I saw the name Central Park on some of the street-cars and thought I would like to visit it, but, fearing that I might not be able to find my way back, I dared not make the adventure. I felt completely lost in the vast throngs of people, the noise of the streets, and the immense size of the buildings. Often I thought I would like to explore the city if, like a lot of wild hills and valleys, it was clear of inhabitants. (186)

Muir's lines suggest an experiential parallel between the built and natural environments: streets bear a visual similarity to valleys, and immense buildings become tall hills. But here Muir also reinforces his preference for picturesque vision and experience: the city structures could welcome exploration, if only Muir was a solitary explorer. Muir's vision of the empty city as a picturesque site reveals the ultimately constructed, artificial fantasy of the aesthetic: imaginatively erasing the history of the landscape—and the people who

reside there. Soon he would arrive in Yosemite Valley, but not before Olmsted articulated his vision of how the Californian wilderness should be preserved for posterity.

Visions of Yosemite

In his address to the Yosemite commissioners in 1865, Olmsted lauded the natural aesthetics of the valley at the same time as he proposed that the creation of a public park there that would benefit the physical and moral health of the nation. "It is a scientific fact," he offered, "that the occasional contemplation of natural scenes of an impressive character […] is favorable to the health and vigor of men." Years later, parklands advocate John Muir would repeat this argument, linking the character of scenery to the character of men in his observation of the growing environmental movement: "Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that […] mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life." Theories about the potential health benefits of being in nature had existed long before Muir and Olmsted took these ideas to their pens. Thoreau observed, "Nature is but another name for health," and, similarly, "We need the tonic of wildness."[47] But Olmsted and Muir's observations on landscapes of both the West and the South suggest that the consumption of nature as an aesthetic object may also elicit spiritual and health benefits. Both writers formulated ideas about the health of the nation in terms of salubrious scenery, giving primacy to the visual aspects of the landscape.

Although Muir has long been associated with the wilderness preservation, Olmsted's role in the early history of Yosemite National Park wasn't well known until the mid-1950s. During the Civil War, Olmsted quit his post at the US Sanitary

[47] Qtd. Branch and Pierce, 395.

Commission and travelled to California to manage the Mariposa mines. While there, he was also appointed to serve on the committee of the newly annexed Yosemite State Park. In 1865, Olmsted presented a proposal for the park's future management to the Yosemite Commissioners, who disagreed with his vision. The report was never forwarded to Congress, but nearly a century later, Olmsted's biographer Laura Wood Roper discovered a copy of the Yosemite address and published a version of the document in the journal *Landscape Architecture.* In the report, "The Yosemite Valley and the Mariposa Big Tree Grove," Olmsted offers an overview of the natural scenery of Yosemite Valley and adjoining areas, and suggests a development plan for the future conservation and enjoyment of the park. Olmsted elaborates on two main reasons for the park's creation: the first being the economic potential of the preservation of the area, and the second being the importance of the formation of the park, and the security of its future enjoyment, to uplifting the spirit of the labor class, and to protect the park from exploitation at the hands of private owners and developers. In the years since its publication, Olmsted's report has been enfolded into the history of the park as a foundational document in the area's conservation. Wendy Harding writes in a 2014 *Ecozon@* essay that the importance of the "aborted document" is overblown. Yet the document remains an important piece in the Olmsted canon, establishing him as an early advocate of wilderness conservation and a voice in environmental philosophy. In an article for the *New England Quarterly*, George Scheper observed that Olmsted's Yosemite report "commend[s] the non-pragmatic, 'for itself' quality of enjoying landscape scenery" in a way similar to Thoreau (376). At the same time that Olmsted suggests that Yosemite should be appreciated as a work of art, he situates the idea of

public park creation and development as an artistic practice in and of itself. In the opening lines of his 1865 address, he aligns the official recognition of Yosemite as public land with what he determines was the greatest period of creativity in American art in recent history:

> It is a fact of much significance with reference to the temper and spirit which ruled the loyal people of the United States during the war of the great rebellion, that a livelier susceptibility to the influence of art was apparent, and greater progress in the manifestations of artistic talent was made, than in any similar period before in the history of the country. ("The Yosemite Valley")

Among the works of art completed during the war, Olmsted lists Central Park and the Capitol dome and its Emmanuel Luetze fresco, on the Atlantic side, as well as the construction of the California State Capitol and the founding of the California Art Union on the Pacific side, that, along with money for hospitals, as fundamental, "liberal contributions" that aided in "binding up the wounds and cheering the spirits of those who were stricken in the battles of liberty." Though many of those injured in the war might never see these works of art, Olmsted suggests that a communal spirit of aesthetic appreciation, even from a distance, is as uplifting to the morale of the country as literal bandages to the immediate wounded. In doing so, he lays the groundwork for his argument that the natural aesthetics of Yosemite elicit moral and physical healing.

Olmsted rhetorically figures the "stately" and "sublime" scenes of Yosemite as both geographic and aesthetic contrasts to the "dark" and "terrible" scenes of war in the forests of Virginia and Georgia:

> It was during one of the darkest hours, before Sherman had begun the march upon Atlanta or Grant his terrible movement through the Wilderness, when the paintings of Bierstadt and the photographs of Watkins, both productions of the war time, had given to the people on the Atlantic some idea of the sublimity of the Yosemite, and of the stateliness of the neighboring Sequoia grove, that consideration was first given to the danger that such scenes might become private property and through the false taste, the caprice or the requirements of some industrial speculation of their holders, their value to posterity be injured.

In doing so, Olmsted constructs a rhetorical parallel between the dangers facing the Union and the danger facing Yosemite: the will of private interest over public good that spurred Olmsted to characterize the South as the cotton *kingdom*.

The tenor of the comparison shifts as Olmsted constructs threats to privatize Yosemite as a threat to democracy and the health of the nation. Olmsted's concern focuses on the need for the working class (he points specifically to women and agricultural laborers) to have easy access to "the opportunity for…recreation" (6). But Olmsted also suggests a correlation between outdoor recreation and the cultivation of aesthetic sensibilities. Looking to the grand hunting grounds of Europe, Olmsted observes, "The enjoyment of the choicest natural scenes in the country and the means of recreation connected with them is thus a monopoly, in a very peculiar manner, of a very few, very rich people"; in contrast, those whom it "would benefit most" were excluded (8). Olmsted equates the "choicest natural scenes" of beauty with "art in any high degree": that is, in contrast to what he deems the "sordid" and "artificial pleasures," such

as “theatres, parades, and promenades.” Cultivating the public’s taste for “sordid interests” of such artificial amusement, Olmsted believed, “distorts the power of appreciating natural beauty and destroys the love of it which the Almighty has implanted in every human being, and which is so intimately and mysteriously associated with the moral perceptions and intuition.” With this assertion, Olmsted articulates his vision that providing park spaces for the working class will assist in cultivating their appreciation of natural beauty that, in turn, will lead to moral reform.

Nowhere in the country, Olmsted asserts, is there such a grand display of the “choicest natural scenes” as in Yosemite. The landscape, he writes, presents the “union of the deepest sublimity with the deepest beauty of nature.” Olmsted wants to propose Yosemite as a balm to heal the wounds of the Civil War, but it’s hard to imagine a Confederate southerner being persuaded. Attempts at representing the landscape fail to capture the grandeur of the place itself:

> No photograph or series of photographs, no paintings ever prepare a visitor so that he is not taken by surprise, for could the scenes be faithfully represented the visitor is affected not only by that upon which his eye is at any moment fixed, but by all that with which on every side it is associated, and of which it is seen only as an inherent part. For the same reason no description, no measurements, no comparisons are of much value.

The value of the scenery lies explicitly in its immense scale, where the long, open space of the valley makes several cliff faces, adorned with waterfalls giving way to soft forest floors, visible at once. The Yosemite landscape:

> It is in no scene or scenes the charm consists, but in the miles of scenery where cliffs of awful height and rocks of vast magnitude and of varied and exquisite coloring, are banked and fringed and draped and shadowed by the tender foliage of noble and lovely trees and bushes, reflected from the most placid pools, and associated with the most tranquil meadows, the most playful streams, and every variety of soft and peaceful pastoral beauty.

Olmsted wrote that he conceived of Yosemite as a "natural history museum," in which a variety of picturesque scenes as well as diverse flora and fauna were on display for view. In doing so, Olmsted displays a prioritizing of the visual perception of the landscape by humans over wilderness for its own sake. Olmsted assumed that the Yosemite landscape as he saw it was paradigmatic of Nature itself: wilderness untrammeled. Yet the Indigenous people of Yosemite had sculpted the landscape through the use of fire to keep the long sightlines of the valley open, making both possible game and approaching enemies more visible. Ironically, Scheper notes, many visitors to Olmsted's Central Park have a similar reaction to Olmsted's perception of Yosemite as a natural, untouched space: many modern day visitors view the grounds of Central Park as "a piece of 'preserved' natural scenery made usable by the addition of some benches, lampposts, and roads rather than as an elaborate construct of artistry and engineering" (370). Some writers have pointed to Olmsted's document as a foundational piece of environmental philosophy; however, Olmsted makes it clear that the park shouldn't be wholly free from development or commercial enterprise, rather, that he wants to protect it from becoming

private property of a few, instead of public site to be enjoyed by many, in which scenic and recreational value are already established goods.

Olmsted had envisioned the park as an antidote to the ills of city life, much like he had described the purpose of Central Park:

> The main object and justification is simply to produce a certain influence in the minds of people and through this to make life in the city healthier and happier. The character of this influence is a poetic one and it is to be produced by means of scenes, through observation of which the mind may be more or less lifted out of moods and habits into which it is, under the ordinary conditions of life in the city. (*Writings* 365)

As the passion for picturesque tourism grew, Olmsted gave a report of the scenic beauty of Yosemite to the *New York Evening Post*, June 18, 1868, appealing to the growing taste for scenic descriptions of nature at the far reaches of the country. John Muir's first article about Yosemite appeared three years later, in the *New York Herald Tribune*. His first ever published article, "The Glaciers of Yosemite," was followed closely by "Yosemite in the Winter" and "Yosemite in the Spring" within the calendar year. Muir saw his forest and parkland advocacy as continuing a wave of environmental conservation that began with the fight for Central Park. In "The American Forests," (*Atlantic* 1897) Muir wrote,

> The wonderful advance made in the last few years… in the planting of the borders of streets and highways and spacious parts in all the great cities, to satisfy the natural taste and hunger for landscape beauty and righteousness that God has put, in some measure, into every human beings and animal, shows the trend of awakening public opinion. The making of far-famed

> New York Central Park was opposed by even good men, with misguided pluck perseverance, and ingenuity; but straight right won its way, and now that park is appreciated. So we confidently believe with our national parks and forest reservations. (156)

In looking to the evolution of the public reception of "New York Central Park" as a model of shifting taste and judgment, Muir's famous celebration of Yosemite could have been inspired by Olmsted even though it is Muir who is associated with the park today.

The Yosemite essays by Olmsted and Muir participated the growing trend of picturesque tourism in America. Emblematic of the popular tourism movement, the book *Picturesque America* edited by poet William Cullen Bryant, sold over one million copies following its publication in 1872. In the description of the project, the publisher D. Appleton wrote that several artists had been commissioned to produce the book. The vistas contained within, the publishers assured readers, were "not only…original and trustworthy, but [would] possess the vividness of personal observation, and include the movement and life characteristic of each locality." Together with essays on the locales depicted, *Picturesque America* was meant to amount to "more than a gallery of landscapes; it will exhibit our people in their methods of living and traveling…. A pictoral cyclopedia of American life." In her book *Creating Picturesque America*, historian Sue Rainey explains that, in the 1870s, the popular "pictoral cyclopedia" offered in text and image many Americans' first glimpses of the United States beyond their backyard: "what they had [before] only abstractly imagined as their country" (87). At the same time, Rainey observes, the volume allowed the "armchair tourist" the ability to find "a union of all these supreme fascinations of scenery" [qtd. in Rainey 87). By presenting

the scenes across America as wedded in this recognizable, familiar aesthetic, the volume envisioned a collective lens of nature appreciation that unified disparate regions of the country. At the same time, as Rainey observes, picturing the picturesque required a refined taste and vision. The volume demonstrated that "the search for the picturesque involves choosing an appropriate vantage point and then investing time and emotional energy in understanding what nature has to teach" (90). Showing that cultivating a taste is essential to nature appreciation, *Picturesque America* operates as an instruction manual, directing the tourist to the appropriate scenery, and teaching them how to appropriately appreciate nature. Bunce notes, the picturesque tourism movement reinforced the idea that "only those of intuitive artistic tastes are enabled to see all the beauties of a landscape" (qtd. in Rainey 90).

Muir's earliest publications on Yosemite operate expressly within the picturesque mode, serving to point out attractive sites and instruct viewers on how to properly appreciate the scenery of the park. In his article "Yosemite in Winter," Muir observed that summer tourism in the Valley was steadily increasing, from 1700 visitors in 1870 to 2150 visitors the next season. At the same time as the article acts as an advertisement for the park, Muir suggests a hint of disdain for the commercial tour operators and the summer tourists they attract: "All of our landlords except one, have disappeared, and doubtless are engaged in concert with stage and railroad companies, with next year's problems of travel, sorting their labyrinth of tolls and trails--their webs for the flies of '72." At the time of the article's publication, tourist accommodations such as the Hutchings hotel were already available in the Valley. But other structures were being added to support not only visitors to the park, but logging operations as well. Though

Muir observes that more "shingle houses" and other "flimsy buildings" are destroying the "natural beauty" of the valley floor, he writes that the majority of the Valley is "unimproveable" and safe from harm: "Her trees and flowers will melt like snow, but her domes and falls are everlasting."

Muir repeats many of the Olmsted's arguments on the moral edification of seeing nature in the 1872 article, "Yosemite in Spring." Muir begins by expressing frustration that the State legislature adjourned for the year "without giving us one Yosemite law" for the management of the area: "We are left to providence for another year," Muir laments, "roadless and moneyless, with only a thousand dollar drop of legislation for the burning thirst of our rights and wrongs." The thousand dollars, Muir observes, goes to the Commissioner of the park's salary and not toward improving trails or roads, or for guaranteeing that the law banning private ownership of the land is enforced. Despite the lack of political support for additional resources and protection against the claims of land ownership, Muir observes that the Valley attractions are nevertheless prime for the coming tourist season. In the tradition of the picturesque tour guide, Muir points out the attractions not to be missed and gives additional encouragement for tourists to see "the greatest" of all the Yosemite waterfalls: the Upper Yosemite flowing from El Capitan. But Muir notes with tempered scorn that only a few people will take the time to see them up close: "Few persons see this fall at a distance of less than a mile, and very little intimation is granted at so uncordial a distance of its surprising glory. It is easily approached on the N side by a climb up the rocks to an altitude of 1,200 feet." He also suggests an even more precise location point and time to best view the falls:

> Seen from up the valley near Lamon's, at about 8 A.M., a cross-section five or six hundred feet in length is most gorgeously irised throughout-not as a motionless arc, but as a living portion of the fall with ordinary forms and motions of shooting rockets and whirling sprays of endless variety of texture transformed to the substance of rainbow melted and flowing.

Muir's rhetorical engagement with promoting picturesque tourism of the Yosemite Valley continues in the first volume Muir edited and published, *Picturesque California* (1888). By then, the success of Bryant's *Picturesque America* had spawned a number of similar titles, including *Picturesque Canada* (1882), *Picturesque Europe* (1879), as well as *The Picturesque Atlas of Australia*. At the time that the San Francisco company J. Dewing released Muir's *Picturesque California*, historian Sue Rainey notes, "countless 'picturesque' viewbooks featuring specific cities or regions were produced all over the country" (281). Muir's volume contained a collection of essays (six by Muir), as well as numerous etchings and wood engraving that described popular tourist destinations and recommended prime viewing sites across the West. The volume opens with a Thomas Moran sketch depicting Yosemite Valley, with the great stone mass of Half Dome towering over the grasses below. Several descriptions in Muir's essay, "The Yosemite Valley," provide an interpretive guide for the scenery depicted in images, including the iconic Valley view. Muir describes the scenery unfolding as though the armchair traveler were taking it in as she approached on foot:

> At the head of the valley, now clearly revealed, stands the Half Dome, the loftiest, most sublime and the most beautiful of all the rocks that guard this glorious temple. From a broad, sloping base planted on the level floor of

> the valley, it rises to a height of 4,750 feet in graceful flowing folds finely sculptured and poised in calm, deliberate majesty. […] Half a mile beyond Washington Column you come to Mirror Lake, lying imbedded in beautiful trees at the foot of Half Dome. A mile beyond the lake the picturesque Tenaya Fall is seen gleaming through the rich leafy forest that fills this portion of the canyon, and to the left of the fall are the Dome Cascades, about a thousand feet in height, filling the canyon with their deep booming roar.

More extensive and exhaustive instructions for picturesque tourism appear through the rest of the essay. Muir scoffs at the popular enthusiasm of tourists to hike up to the top of Half Dome, because he believes that the effects of "foreshortening" reveal the other great sights of Yosemite at a disadvantage: the North Dome "is dwarfed almost beyond all recognition," and one may not see the Royal Arches at all. Even worse, Muir concludes, the "most sublime" feature of the Valley, Half Dome itself, "is beneath one's feet." Muir worries that tourists are too eager to come during the popular summer months, and recommends visiting in autumn or December instead. The worst kind of tourist to the Valley, Muir suggests, are those who "buy [their] ticket[s] early," participating in a mass-produced, consumptive spectacle of viewing nature: "The regular tourist, ever in motion, is one of the most characteristic productions of the present century; […] frivolous and inappreciative."

Initially, Muir suggests that even these tourists are an encouraging sign of the rejection of the worst parts of industrial society:

> [V]iewed comprehensively they are a hopeful and significant sign of the times, indicating at least a beginning of our return to nature. […] Perhaps nowhere else along the channels of pleasure travel may so striking and interesting a variety of people be found together as in this comparatively wild and remote Yosemite. Men, women, and children of every creed and color come here from every country under the sun; farmers, men of business, lawyers, doctors, and divines; scientists seeking causes, wealthy and elegant loafers trying to escape from themselves, the titled and obscure, all in some measure seeing and loving wild beauty, and traveling to better purpose than they know, borne onward by currents that they cannot understand, like ships at sea.

Muir's assessment of the state of tourism appears generally inclusive and democratic at first glance. He appreciates that people from a variety of backgrounds have made the trip to Yosemite to view the sights. But Muir's assessment of best practices for tourists in Yosemite reveals an unsurprising hierarchy that places the experience of independent explorers above the majority of tourists, who "keep together and fall into the hands of the local guides by whom they are led hastily from point to point along the beaten trails." In contrast, Muir celebrates the seemingly self-reliant explorers, "mostly members of Alpine Clubs, sturdy Englishmen and Germans,"—mountaineers, not tourists—whom Muir admiringly observes, "push out bravely over the adjacent mountains, radiating far into the High Sierra among the ice and snow. They thread the mazes of the glorious forests, and trace the wild young streams in their courses down from the glaciers through grandly sculptured canyons […] sharing in all their exhilarating rush and roar." Far from the

inclusive, democratic vision of visitors to Yosemite that Muir described earlier, the membership of the London-based Alpine Club comprised the most exclusive, elite mountaineering organization in the world: the club limited membership to skilled and highly educated "gentlemen" climbers (women weren't allowed to join until 1975).[48]

Muir celebrates the alpinists for their athletic skill (they can hike long distances and move skillfully over the glaciated terrain) as well as the Romantic spirit of adventure they seem to embody: individuals who heroically navigate their own paths through the woods, regardless of the risk of trekking in the high-altitude terrain and the uncertainty of traveling in a foreign land without guides. In the High Sierra, scrambling over the snowfields and glaciated peaks, the climbers would've been high above treeline, able to see far in the distance. The tourists, in contrast "keep themselves in perpetual motion, following each other along dusty trails, painfully 'doing' the valley by rule." The dust the visitors kick up on the trail adds to Muir distaste for these organized tours; moving over the the ice and snow, mountaineers make no dust. Eventually, the evolution in Muir's taste for picturesque landscapes leads him to disdain the crowded, dusty trail.

From Scenic Preservation to Ecological Conservation

Environmental scholars have long documented the strong correlation between aesthetic valuation of landscapes and preservation policy in the past. The traditional scenes of the Burkian sublime—"gloomy forests," "the howling wilderness" and other vertiginous landscapes, caverns, and chasms—illustrate that perception was essential to this concept.

[48] In contrast, the German and Austrian Alpine Association, though like others across the European continent, "often led by members of the 'grand bourgeoisie,'" they were also open to the middle class, as long as they paid a fee (Hansen 193). (Later, the Sierra Club and other early North American climbing organizations would seek to match the expertise of the British Alpine Clubs with an American democratic ethos.)

A field that is a hundred yards in length, Burke explained, "will never work such an effect as a tower an hundred yards high, or a rock or mountain of that altitude" (76). It is not only size that matters, but relief: "a perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime," he argues.

In "The Trouble with Wilderness," William Cronon observes that the aesthetics of the sublime led to the preservation of mountain and wilderness scenery at the exclusion of others: "God was on the mountaintop, in the chasm, in the waterfall [….] One has only to think of the sites that Americans chose for their first national parks […] to realize that virtually all of them fit one or more of these categories." As Ethan Linck writes in a May 2018 *High Country News* article, "Your Stoke Won't Save Us," U.S. Park Service management demonstrates "a bias towards rock and ice in national parks and wilderness areas, what the Park Service itself admits is an overrepresentation of 'scenic alpine vistas ... compared with low-elevation areas with higher primary production, species diversity and richness, and complex ecosystem structure.'"

Meanwhile, Allen Carlson suggests that the picturesque "achieved pre-eminence as a model for nature appreciation" in the nineteenth century because it provided a framework to turn nature into an "object of appreciation"; whereas the categories of the beautiful and sublime prioritized the experience of the viewer ("Aesthetic Appreciation" 139, footnote 6). But by the end of the nineteenth century, American scholar Carrie Tirado Bramen explains, the term "picturesque" became associated with the artificial, "more concerned with surfaces than depths" (444). The sublime, too, became cliché, regularly denoting wilderness or mountainous landscapes, and not necessarily a subjective response of the viewer. Nevertheless, for much of the twentieth century, as

Callicot observes, swamps remained "the real outcasts of taste in natural objects" through the twentieth century (3). In "Aesthetics in the Swamps," Holmes Rolston III suggests that wetlands and swamps are "the most misunderstood" landscapes: "There is nothing picturesque in a dismal swamp" (584). Indeed the first national park in the swamps of the South (Everglades) wasn't officially dedicated until 1947. The honor occurred after a natural history writer popularized the idea that the area wasn't a stagnant swamp, but a slow-moving river; and, as Callicot observes, these areas are no longer called "swamps", but the more aesthetically suggestive term, "wetlands."

In recent years, Baird and Callicott have attempted to account for the failure of traditional natural aesthetics in protecting ecologically sensitive environments such as swamps, or as they're more recently come to be termed, wetlands. An ecological aesthetics, built from the notion of scientific cognitivism, suggests that the perceived ecological value of a landscape or its rarity can increase its aesthetic value. Recognizing that over half of wetland environments have disappeared in the course of the last century has contributed to the revolution in taste for wetland scenery. Callicot suggests that the "(wet)land aesthetic", derived from Aldo Leopold's land ethic, but also building from writing of Thoreau and Muir, suggests that an understanding of "natural history, and more especially, evolutionary and ecological biology," will lead to a better aesthetic appreciation of the landscape (44). Yet a 2008 study "Foundations for an Ecological Aesthetic: Can Information Alter Landscape Preferences?" found that simply providing people with information about the biodiversity or ecology of a wetland or did not change their perception of the aesthetic value of the landscape. The writers suggest that, instead of working to change what people consider beautiful and ugly land, it would be better to

"appeal more directly for acceptance of restoration outcomes (however ugly) on ecological grounds" (Hill and Daniel, 46).

For better or for worse, the picturesque aesthetic still dominates Sierra Club calendars and Patagonia catalogues today. Raymond J. O'Brien observes in *The Symbolic Earth*, paintings of landscapes coded as sublime presented the viewer with mountainous sites and "diminutive human figures depicted as shepherds, farmers, Indians, city types, or other 'idlers.' Invariably, they have their backs turned to the foreground, a technique that leads the viewer to identify with the figures and imparts a quality of isolation and spaciousness to the landscape in which people-dwarfed by nature-appear dominated by a powerfully compelling (perhaps frightening) environment" (1981, p. 174). The National Geographic photographer Jimmy Chin sums up this perspective trick in an Instagram comment, when someone asked how to compose good photos: "Tiny person, big landscape." The proliferation of drone footage in the 2018 Banff Mountain Film Festival and similar outdoor-oriented film festivals shows that long, sweeping cinematic views still dominate our aesthetic preferences and inspire in turn more film festivals and scenic tourism devoted to those spaces. If the outdoor industry and recreation community is to take seriously their goals of being more environmentalist, they need to step away from scenic shots and recreation economy-based conservation, and start advocating for people, places and communities.

CHAPTER IV

ROMANTIC SCIENCE AND THE LITERATURE OF MOUNTAINEERING

In January 2015, the *New York Times* began offering daily updates on the front page of their website on the progress of two climbers as they attempted to climb a new route up the 3,000-foot granite face of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park. For weeks, the climbers committed to the "ground-up" ethic of first ascents (starting at the bottom and not leaving the route until they reached the top) and slept in hanging tents attached to the wall. The story captivated an audience beyond the climbing community, and the *Times* coverage continued for weeks, until both climbers finally appeared atop the formation, where friends, family—and a host of reporters and TV news cameras—greeted them. The story has since been retold in a best-selling memoir by one of the climbers, Tommy Caldwell, as well as made into a feature-length documentary, *The Dawn Wall*. In February 2019, *Free Solo*, another feature documentary about a different ascent of El Capitan—this time without ropes or a partner—won an Academy Award. As climbing and mountaineering become more visible in various forms of cultural expression, interest in climbing as an activity has also grown. Participation in indoor and outdoor climbing is on the rise, and for the first time ever, the Summer Olympics will award a medal in climbing in the 2020 games.

Once largely considered a fringe activity of the leisure class, climbing and mountaineering have entered the mainstream in popular culture. At the same time, mountain studies has become a rich, if yet emergent, scholarly discipline. For several years, Marjorie Hope Nicolson's *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory* (1959) was the only monograph on Western cultural responses to mountain environments, while articles

on the subject remained scarce. But in recent decades, book-length academic studies on the history of mountaineering in the Himalaya, as well as in the Alps and North America, and the history of Yosemite climbing and culture have appeared.[49] Since 2012, the tri-annual conference "Thinking Mountains" has brought together scholars across fields and disciplines, from practicing mountaineers to climate change and glacier scientists to philosophers, historians, and English professors. Peter H. Hansen's *The Summits of Modern Man* (2013) provides a thorough analysis of how the quest for first ascents of the major peaks of the Alps inspired a summit fever that spread around the globe, and how these climbs reinforced notions of the domination of nature while they also nurtured Romantic visions of men (and they usually were men) connecting with a sublime landscape.

As Hansen and others' studies have shown, the cultural expressions of climbing and mountaineering are awash with seeming paradoxes and contradictions, which can be traced back to the beginning of the pursuit of wandering the high places of the earth. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, amid changing perceptions of wild landscapes, the growth of natural history and the ascendency of the sublime aesthetic, mountain environments attracted climbers to survey new lands on the boundaries of multiple frontiers. Such explorers were often motivated by a potpourri of desires, most prominently, to climb mountains for scientific or aesthetic purposes. Around the turn of the eighteenth century, the varieties of cultural expression of mountain climbs, from

[49] These include *Fallen Giants: A History of Himalayan Mountaineering from the Age of Empire to the Age of Extremes* (Weaver and Isserman); *Continental Divide: A History of Mountaineering in North America* (Isserman); and *Apostles of the Alps: Mountaineering and Nation Building in Germany and Austria, 1860-1939* (Keller), among others.

summit reports to natural history logs to adventure narratives, often conveyed a mixture of scientific or observational and Romantic or aesthetic discourses.

These climbing narratives also enjoyed a wide audience. French artist and explorer Marc-Theodore Bourrit's travel narrative, *Description des glacières, glaciers et amas de glace du Duché de Savoie* (1773), was translated into several languages. The English version was so popular it saw three successive editions of print within the span of two years. In 1803, following his return from his travels in South America, Alexander von Humboldt began a lecture tour of Europe, where audiences clamored, not for a discussion of his theories of the earth, but for his account of his attempt to climb to the apex of Chimborazo. During his travels, Humboldt estimated the elevation of the mountain at 3350 *toises* (21,421 feet).[50] At the time, Westerners believed that Chimborazo was the tallest mountain on earth (within decades, colonial British expeditions would measure significantly taller peaks in the Indian Himalaya). Though Humboldt and his companions did not make it to the top of Chimborazo, they set a global altitude record that would stand for nearly thirty years.

With the rise of Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century, mountain climbing was deeply symbolic to the notion of the transcendent individual. But mountaineering was also as much a metaphor as a mandate for the growth of early scientific knowledge. Mountains themselves serve as a powerful symbol in Romantic literature, but few Romanticists have looked to the role of literary narratives of mountaineers to help describe how that aesthetic transformation took place, as studies of Romantic science also tend to neglect mountaineering narratives from this period. In the burgeoning field of mountain studies, literary analysis of nineteenth-century texts has

[50] See Humboldt, "About an Attempt," fn. 3.

largely focused on the print culture of the Alpine Club, formed in mid-century London. In this article, I suggest that the accounts of mountaineers on both sides of the Atlantic from 1770-1830 are important to understanding how aesthetic and scientific curiosity about mountains complimented each other, and, later, participated in the growth of interest in mountaineering as a leisure practice. This chapter has two aims: the first is as an intervention in mountaineering studies, which have tended to neglect this period of mountaineering and its literature, and the second is to contribute to the field of literary Romantic science. Motivated both by increasing interest in the sublime notion of the heights and the desire for scientific understanding of the earth, the narratives of early mountaineering should form an important contribution to the study of the literary expressions of transatlantic Romantic science, as well as the ascendency of the character of the mountaineer in the popular imagination.

This chapter begins with a discussion of mountaineering and its contours, then the role of Romantic science, before moving to four emblematic moments of mountaineering in this story: the French travel writer Marc-Theodore Bourrit and physicist Honore Bénédict de Saussure in the Alps; the American botanist William Bartram on Mt. Magnolia, Prussian explorer and naturalist Alexander von Humboldt on the Peak of Teneriffe; and Darwin's ascent of Monte Sarmiento. Spanning separate continents, these figures contributing to public engagement with mountaineering at the same time as their writing tracks changes within Romantic science and attitudes toward mountains and mountaineering in the early nineteenth century.

Defining mountaineering and its literature

The neglect of mountaineering and its narratives in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-literary studies may rise in part from the loose and often contested boundaries of the term "mountaineering" itself. The precise origin of modern mountaineering is contested among historians of the sport; defining the contours of mountaineering literature, in turn, is not an easy task. For some mountaineering historians, the advent of mountaineering literature and its forms begins and contains only technical ascents. Yet for more literary minded scholars, mountaineering literature appears to extend beyond the pursuit of technical climbs to observations on mountains and their environments. The question of defining mountaineering literature first begins with defining mountaineering itself.

Many historians locate the birth of mountaineering in the Alps with the first ascent of Mont Blanc in 1786, though mountain narratives reached a wide audience on both sides of the Atlantic before then. As David Mazel demonstrates in his anthology of American climbing, *Pioneering Ascents*, the first written record of a mountain climb seems to have begun in the New World as early as 1642, when the émigré Darby Field climbed what is today known as Mt. Washington (6,288ft.) in present-day New Hampshire.[51] The story of the ascent, catalogued in the journal of the then-governor of

[51] Of course, forms of mountain climbing in North and South America predate the arrival of European colonists and settlers to the area. Evidence of Native American presence on summits has been documented as early as 10,000 BCE. In *Pioneering Ascents*, Mazel acknowledges that "Mountaineering in the New World actually started much earlier with its native inhabitants" (8). But as Katie Ives observes in *Alpinist* 55, "What is remarkable is the extent to which—in many mainstream histories—these older climbs have been relegated to margins or simply blotted out" (11). Darby Field had multiple Native guides on his ascent, as Ives points out: "Colonial accounts left no record of the names or desires of his Abenaki guides" (12). Stories of Native ascents and climbs still circulate in oral tradition. Navajo climber Len Necefer recalls a song his grandfather sung of an important climb of the Navajo spiritual peak Sisnaajini (today known as Blanca Peak) in *Alpinist* 64: "I am walking toward the mountain/ I am at the bottom, looking up / I am walking on the mountain / The mountain is asking, 'Who are you? Who are you?' / I am your

Massachusetts, John Winthrop, doesn't indicate the reasons why Field made the trip: some speculate that it was to see if there were rare gems on the summit. Field didn't find any precious stones at the top; regardless, he and "divers others" made the climb up to the summit again that same year (Mazel 13). In his book *Continental Divide: A History of American Mountaineering*, historian Maurice Isserman similarly locates the "dawn of American mountaineering" at Field's ascent (1). Though others repeated his feat, Isserman notes that the climb itself was regarded mostly as an "odd endeavor" at the time (6). Euro-American ascents of mountains continued throughout the seventeenth century, often for the purposes of surveying new lands.

Greater interest surrounded mountaineering activities in Europe toward the end of the eighteenth century, as exploration narratives found readership with a popular audience. The notion of competition also fostered the interest in attaining mountain summits. As early as 1760, the Swiss physicist and geologist Horace Bénédict de Saussure promised a monetary prize to the team that made the first ascent of Mont Blanc (15,781ft.), the highest peak in Western Europe. In 1786, two climbers from Chamonix, crystal hunter Jacques Balmat and physician Michel-Gabriel Paccard, made the first ascent of the peak. Some historians point to this ascent as the birth of mountaineering, when climbers attempted to get to the top of a summit, seemingly for the sole claim of being the first. But the other motivations and inspirations for the Mont Blanc climb—including Saussure's encouragement of it, reveal the entanglements of mountaineering as a sport and a scientific pursuit. The following year, Saussure reached the apex of that

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grandchild and I have come back to you" (104). A deep study of these stories and events would form an essential contribution to the history and literature of climbing in North America, providing an alternate narrative to the Euro-American pursuit of peaks as a form of conquest.

same mountain, making observations of the barometric and temperature readings on his instruments along the way.

A final claim for the birth of modern mountaineering is positioned in the 1850s in London, when historians generally agree that a community formed around the idea of climbing mountains as forming an end in itself. In 1857 the exclusive Alpine Club of London formalized the term mountaineering and mountaineer with the restrictive requirements to claim membership in that club. Members of the lower class were, by nature, excluded from hiring Swiss guides and travelling to remote locations to make such ascents. The club also limited its membership to men, only (a restriction that lasted until 1976). As Stephen Slemon observes, "'Mountaineering' did not organize the way in which earlier scientific expeditions or Romantic travellers went into mountaineer regions. […] In the 1850s, mountaineering became a distinct, coherent, and ultimately highly codified practice, and what made it so was the formation of a consolidated, organized, metropolitan, male-only, and middle-class community" (238). The formal goals of the Alpine Club were to "[…] facilitate association among those who possess a similarity of taste, and to enable its members to make arrangements for meeting at some suitable locality whence they may in company undertake any of the more difficult mountain excursions … The members will occasionally dine together" (Alpine Club 1857, quoted in Slemon 239).

The modern form of mountaineering, Slemon observes, "achieves its rugged, self-heroizing meaning — the mountaineer as the epitome of the autonomous individual — in the middle of the nineteenth century, with "the invention of mountaineering" (Hansen 1995) as a specific form of organized and codified leisure activity" (236). As Hansen

writes, mountaineering provided a new arena in which to demonstrate forms of "heroic masculinity" as climbers described their efforts as though in battle with the mountain, fighting against its obstacles to achieve the summit as a signifier of domination (86). Climbers had to demonstrate their technical skill with a resume of climbing experience on high mountains in the Alps. By the middle of the nineteenth century, as Alan McNee writes in *The New Mountaineer in Late Victorian Britain*, climbers began to undertake mountaineering as a "recognized leisure activity," pursued for "sporting rather than from scientific motives" (7). Yet in the formation of the Alpine Club, the organizers modeled their group after many of the learned societies—most of them scientific institutions—that also had strict rules of membership and a record of reading papers and producing publications. The Royal Society, founded in London in 1660, held regular meetings where club members read papers on their recent experiments and observations. Like the Royal Society, the Linnaean society, founded in 1788 for the study of botany, excluded women from membership until the twentieth century. "That the practice of mountaineering came to be institutionalized in a similar fashion to that of science was neither accidental nor an inevitable consequence of the nature of the activity," sociologist David Robbins observed in the paper "Sport, Hegemony and the Middle Class" (587).

By the middle of the nineteenth century, many members of the Alpine Club actively began to seek to distance their mountain pursuits from professional scientific activity. W.A.B. Coolidge, another former president of the Alpine Club, remarked in his history of the sport *The Alps in Natural History* (1908) that "Englishmen were waking up to the fact that 'mountaineering' is a pastime that combines many advantages, and is worth pursuing as an end in itself, without any regard to any thought of the advancement

of natural science" (231). At the same time, as the study of the earth fractured into smaller subsets, generic natural history work was seen as less rigorous. Rising in prestige, disciplinary scientists contested that, without experimentation based on the scientific method, natural philosophy offered limited truths about the natural world. Nevertheless, some chroniclers of the mountain environment persisted in their pursuit of integrated knowledge of nature. As McNee and others have observed, there was never a distinct moment when mountaineers abandoned all scientific aims for pursuits of higher and more difficult summits. Within the Alpine Club, members competed with each other to become the first to attain the first ascent of ever-steepening peaks. Across Europe, more alpine clubs began to emerge as the "claiming" of summits took on nationalistic significance. By the end of the nineteenth century, mountaineering and natural history had become entirely separate endeavors.

Fast-forward to the twenty-first century, however, and one can find many climbers, alpinists and mountaineers who recoil from the athletic and competitive associations of calling mountaineering a sport. Even technical manuals of mountaineering offer descriptions of the pursuit as a pastime befitting renegades and outcasts, not professional athletes. The first chapter of the standard climber textbook, *Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills*, published by the Seattle Mountaineers' Press, offers a more wide-ranging definition of the activity:

> Mountaineering is many things: climbing, breathtaking views, and wilderness experience. It can be the fulfillment of childhood dreams or an opportunity to grow in the face of difficulty. Mountains harbor adventure and mystery. The challenge of mountaineering offers you a chance to learn

> about yourself by venturing beyond the confines of the modern world and to forge lifetime bonds with climbing partners. (1)

Definitions of mountaineering are thus as varied and fluid as the definitions of its literature. Studies of mountaineering and mountaineering literature begin either with the start of mountaineering as a technical sport, or with texts and poems that contain a literal uphill journey as a main focus of the work. Mountaineering historian Jill Neate's bibliography *Mountain Literature* indexes literary texts, both fiction and nonfiction, that pertain exclusively to technical climbing of some difficulty and challenge, and the activity as a sport pursued for its own sake. Nevertheless, in the introduction to her text, Neate reflected, "A practicable definition of a 'mountaineering' book continues to elude me" (vii). Yet in an effort at thoroughness in documenting books of mountaineering literature, Neate limited the entries in her volume to those texts "with an obvious mountaineering content" as well as those that seemed to be "of practical use, pleasure and historical interest" to mountaineers (viii). Neate's bibliography, therefore, does not include the poems of Wordsworth or Shelley upon Mont Blanc, or of Alexander von Humboldt on his attempt at Chimborazo. In contrast, Mazel's collection *Pioneering Ascents* includes excerpts from more literary accounts of non-technical climbs, where the walker or hiker may have strolled up some elevation to gain a view. As Mazel observes, "if one accepts that rather narrow definition of climbing [as a 'sport engaged for its own sake'], then there were indeed few American mountaineers before the late 1800s"—not to mention works of literary merit (5). In compiling the excerpts for his anthology, Mazel took what he described as the "layman's view" of mountaineering and its literature, stating, "I…am willing to call a 'mountain climber' anyone who climbs up a mountain,

regardless of the difficulty of the feat or the motivations underlying it" (5). Literature professor Armand E. Singer similarly noted the difficulty of defining mountaineering literature in the introduction to a volume of essays on the subject, *Essays on the Literature of Mountaineering* (1982):

> It is, I would claim, however uneven, difficult to pin down, to document or prove, much less to explain, what cements together the whole literature of mountaineering, and perforce, the essays in this book. … We could limit the term 'mountaineering' strictly to climbs on the almost-vertical rock-and-ice faces that all too often currently characterize the sport. I happen to be more latitudinarian. The Lake poets trekking in the hills, the modest scrambler amidst the Eastern seaboard Appalachians…all merit consideration. So interpreted, mountaineering offers an embarrassment of choices. Actually, it is pretty much the only sport to inspire a true literary genre of impressive size. (viii-ix)

The notion that mountaineering is one of the most, if not the most, written-about sport appears in several other studies and essays on the subject. In a 1996 *Harpers* essay, opinion writer Bruce Barcott observed, "To this day mountain climbing remains the most literary of all sports. No other activity so compels its participants, from the international star to the weekend scrambler, to turn each personal conquest into public tale."

The literature of mountaineering, however narrowly or broadly one chooses to define it, forms an "inalienable relationship" with the very practice of mountaineering itself, as historian Zac Robinson outlines in his essay, "Early alpine club culture and mountaineering literature" (105). Cultural influences on mountaineers appear in their

essays and books upon the subject. David Mazel categorizes American mountaineering literature into two distinct types. On the one hand, there are stories that tell the tale of mountaineering as conquest and as an arm of manifest destiny, and on the other, what he refers to as the "dissenting view," evident in early writers such as Mark Catesby and William Bartram, and which culminates in the work of Thoreau and Muir, "in which mountains were admired primarily for their own beauty and for the power effect they could have on the climber" (7). Mazel acknowledges, however, that the task of isolating specific objectives for any mountaineering attempt is difficult. For instance, Thoreau, whom Mazel acknowledges was a much more impressive as a writer than a climber, made several trips to the mountains under a variety of motivations: "at times from the standpoint of the scientist and at times from that of the philosopher. He observed clearly the mountains themselves and the profound effects they can have on those who climb them, so that even his climbing essays are as much about men as mountains" (7-8). In the anthology *Contact*, Jeff McCarthy envisions climbers as a group of people with exceptional knowledge of the natural world: "climbers rub endlessly against the natural world, and a pearl of environmental awareness grows to differing shapes in each climber and each climb" (ix). "I suggest we understand the mountaineering narrative as a symptom of Western civilization, and a measure of civilizations' shifting approaches to the environment" (2). McCarthy goes on to elaborate on three categories of mountaineering literature: 1) conquest, where capturing a new summit or finding a new route drives the narrative; 2) caretaking, where the narrator "emphasizes appreciation for the mountain environment," and 3) connection, in which the narrator seeks to commune

with the mountain landscape. Of course, McCarthy notes, these categories are not fixed but fluid, and narratives often contain a mixture of all three elements.

At its core, mountaineering literature constitutes a willingness and desire to trek upward; sometimes it is for a view, sometimes as an athletic achievement, and sometimes, as Mazel writes, simply to see "what the mountains can show you."

Mountaineering and Romantic science

As demonstrated in the section above, definitions of mountaineering tend to coalesce around the stated motivations for the activity of climbing a mountain. Of course, these motivations can be varied, and even at times may seem to be in conflict with each other. To understand the role of mountaineering in the growth of the sciences and in aesthetic theory, I suggest, it is helpful to situate early forms of mountaineering and its literature within the ideological and temporal context of Romantic science.

Historians of science, as the editors Andrew Cunningham and Nicholas Jardine note in their introduction to *Romanticism and the Sciences*, note the occurrence of two major scientific revolutions that span the period of the Enlightenment and Romanticism: the first revolution, at the end of the sixteenth century, gave rise to what is known as "natural philosophy," that is, "mathematically and experimentally oriented" models and theories for understanding the world, otherwise known today as Enlightenment rationalism (1). The second revolution, at the turn of the eighteenth century, saw the formation of "the disciplines we call 'science'" (1). As science historian David Knight points out, the sciences at this time "lacked sharp and natural frontiers": the various disciplines of physics, astronomy, chemistry, biology, geology and geodosy were still emerging (13). As Knight observes, "specialization" in what we today think of as

separate fields was just "beginning" in the late eighteenth century, but it was "not yet necessary for success in the sciences" (13). In the edited volume, *Romantic Science: The Literary Forms of Natural History* Noah Herringman draws a distinction between natural philosophy of the earlier period and natural history in the Romantic period, observing that natural history necessitated "fieldwork," in order to make "natural knowledge accessible to a generalist public, both in the field and on the printed page," whereas natural philosophy centered on mathematical models and theories (3). The distinction between the two practices and their literature, Herringman writes, "was crucial" in part "because it permitted the synthesis between theory and fieldwork that produced many of the modern disciplines" (3).

During this period of brewing ideological change, the narratives of sailors and explorers participated in the growing discourse of scientific knowledge. The editors of *Literature, Science and Exploration in the Romantic Era: Bodies of Knowledge* explain in their introduction to that volume, exploration narratives "were accepted as valid scientific documents if they followed a 'plain, unvarnished' style in which the explorer's impressions were represented as objectively observed 'evidence.' If they did not, they might be dismissed as travellers' tales—fanciful fiction" (2). Chroniclers of new information, however, often intermingled subjective and objective observations of the universe: though tales that contained more "aesthetic" writing risked being labeled as "fiction," scientific narratives still often contained hints of the subjective viewer's response to the objects or landscapes he encountered. Thus, as the editors of that volume explain, "A number of explorers were both literary and scientific writers simultaneously. Their writing reveals the overlaps between what we today designate as separate things"

(4). The majority of this transformation, Tim Fulford writes in his introduction to *Romanticism and Science*, largely took place during what literary scholars have come to define as the Romantic period. The changes in "science" practice occurred such that "what was in 1773 largely amateur natural philosophy performed by gentlemen had, by 1833, begun to turn into institutionalized disciples," Fulford writes (1). While "Scientific exploration shaped the writing we have come to call Romantic," Fulford observes, it also fermented in the practice of Romantic science (15). In the arena of mountain climbing, readers were brought up close to the mountain to see the what philosophers had previously only imagined, all without leaving the comfort of their own homes. Such flights of imaginative fancy soon earned their own term: "armchair mountaineering."

Romantic science can be defined by a number of characteristics. Many historians and literary scholars agree that one major defining characteristic of Romantic science is the notion of the "unity of organicism" that ties into a sense of a "transcendental evolutionary scheme," as Knight writes (22). The Romantic scientist, like the Romantic poet, viewed Nature as "infinite" and "mysterious," with "secrets" that waited "to be discovered" (Holmes xviii). This was in part a response to the rejection of the mechanistic view of the universe, as Holmes writes, as demonstrated in "the mathematical world of Newtonian physics, the hard material words of objects and impacts" (xviii). In contrast, as Holmes describes, Romantic scientists "favored a softer 'dynamic' science of invisible powers and mysterious energies, of fluidity and transformation, of growth and organic change" (xvii). Another major tenet of Romantic science was the notion of the scientist as a heroic figure. As Cunningham and Jardine describe, "The self image of the new 'men of science' was to be largely constituted by

Romantic themes—scientific discovery as the work of genius, the pursuit of knowledge as a disinterested and heroic quest, the scientist as actor in a dramatic history, the autonomy of a scientific elite" (8). Naturally, the figure of the explorer and the travelling natural historian fit tidily into this new narrative: Romantic scientists often cast themselves in both the literal and metaphorical roles of the explorer on a "voyage, often lonely and perilous" (Holmes xvii). The figure of the Romantic scientist embodied the same kind of genius of the Romantic poet or artist, "thirsting and reckless for knowledge, *for its own sake and perhaps at any cost*" (Holmes xvii, emphasis original). The Romantic writer Mary Shelley pursued the notion of the quest for knowledge regardless of consequence in *Frankenstein* (1818), where, fittingly, the young doctor confronts the sublimity and awfulness of the "creature" among the rough landscape of the Alps. The notion of the Romantic scientist pursuing knowledge "at any cost" also resembles the early mountaineers summit fever and willingness to accept risk in the pursuit.

Yet in the studies of Romanticism and science by Knight, Fulford, Herringman, Holmes, Cunningham and Jardine, no volumes contain any sustained analysis or discussion of the role that mountaineering and its literature in the growth of Romantic science at the time. But many early mountaineering narratives embodied the tenets of Romantic science. As some historians have emphasized, the pursuit of mountain summits in its earliest beginnings was often intertwined with collection of data about the high mountain environment, including notes on the weather, glaciers, geology, flora and other observations relevant to the study of natural history. At the end of the eighteenth century in America, mountain ranges served as borders to the growth of both empire and scientific knowledge. In trekking to the heights, explorers carried thermometers and

barometers—tools invented during the eighteenth century—as they observed and catalogued trees, plants and flowers, adding to the awareness of potential resources for expanding imperial powers. Their notes on the features of the terrain, including soil consistency and slope, would later assist prospective settlers on the American frontier.

Scientific curiosity about mountains accompanied growing aesthetic appreciation of them, though discussions of Romanticism and mountains tends to focus on how Romantic poets drew upon the image of the mountain as a powerful aesthetic symbol of the sublime. Edmund Burke, in his treatise *A Philosophical Enquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* (1757) posited that the relief of the tallest mountains was what most made them appear grand: "A perpendicular has more force in forming the sublime, than an inclined plane; and the effects of a rugged and broken surface seem stronger than where it is smooth and polished" (76). Additionally of interest to the aspirant climber, Burke posited, "I am apt to imagine […] that we are more struck at looking down from a precipice, than looking up at an object of equal height: but of that I am not very positive" (Burke was admittedly not a mountaineer himself) (76). As literary scholar and mountaineer Robert H. Bates noted in his doctoral thesis, most of the mountains included in the poetry of the Romantics were glimpsed at a distance: though Wordsworth and Shelley evoked Mont Blanc in verse as a powerful symbol of nature, they never set foot on its summit. As Anne C. McCarthy observes in her study of the art of descent (i.e. wingsuit flying, base jumping and rappelling), "strictly speaking, none of the major eighteenth-century or Romantic theories prescribes a physical route to the sublime" (546). In his collected essays, *The Playground of Europe*, British mountaineer Leslie Stephen observed that, "before the turning-point of the eighteenth century a

civilized being might, if he pleased, regard the Alps with unmitigated horror" (43). In her monograph *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory*, Marjorie Hope Nicholson expanded on this historical argument, noting that British poets in the seventeenth century detailed mountains in paradoxical fashion, "vascill[ating] between lip service to classical epithets such as 'heaven-kissing' or 'star touching' and condemnation of the 'warts, wens, blisters, imposthumes' that mar the face of Nature" (xiv). But by the late eighteenth century, Nicolson explains, poets "went out of their way to include mountains in their descriptive poetry, introducing long and exhaustive passages showing that mountain description had become an important part of landscape poetry" (xiv). In North America, historian Maurice Isserman similarly observes in his history of American mountaineering that the growing aesthetic appreciation of mountains was "something new in American writings about landscape and wilderness" at the beginning of the nineteenth century (22).

Proto-Romantic Beginnings: Bourrit and Saussure in the Alps

Marc-Theodore Bourrit, a French alpinist, writer and historian, proclaimed an early ascent of the Buet in 1771 and had attempted to reach the summit of Mont Blanc over several seasons. Like Saussure, Bourrit circulated stories of his Alpine travels for publication; but, as Peter Hansen explains, Bourrit's books and tales were far more popular than those of Saussure because Bourrit engaged in the fashionable style of writing, today known as the genre of sentimentalism. His narrative *Description des glacières, glaciers et amas de glace du Duché de Savoie* (1773) was a literary best seller, translated into several languages and printed in many editions.[52] In the Preface to the English edition (1774), the editor Hensted Suffolk emphasized that Bourrit's journeys took place in what was perhaps "the most romantic country in the world" (v). Indeed, the

[52] The success of Bourrit's work is noted in Hansen, 54-55.

landscape would have seemed spectacular: in the Duchy of Savoy (in contemporary geography, the Western Alps), the snows of the white peaks glimmered over 14,000 feet into the sky, while avalanches and rock fall sputtered down from the mountains' glaciated flanks, the din adding an edge of danger to such glimpses of beauty. But in the preface, Suffolk explained, the initial effort of the translators (Charles and Fred Davy) was not a success when it first appeared among the friendly circles of the translators. The first edition was circulated with the term "Picturesque" appended to the title page; this addition, the editor explained, fostered the premise that the book was "a mere descriptive Trifle" (vi). By employing that aesthetic term, the editor surmised, the first edition of the translation was susceptible to prejudice from a more scientific-minded audience that the book should have appealed to: "as though [the book] might delight and entertain the *Fancy*, [it] could not merit the attention of a man of sense, as if it were indubitably certain, that what is recommended to the *Taste* must *therefore* be unworthy of the *Judgment*" (vi). In the preface, Suffolk outlined the seeming tension between the search for "truth" and the passion of "taste," defined here as "elegance" and "beauty" (v). "Thus writing has been separated into two distinct classes, the *scientific* and *diverting*" (vii). But this distinction is an erroneous one, Suffolk declared: "That conduct of our education must be wrong, which separates those Powers [beauty and truth]," for, "In all the works of Nature, usefulness and beauty are united" (xiv). In preparing the audience to receive the text, the editor suggests that both authors and readers imitate Nature itself: to unite the cultivation of "Judgment" and "Taste": scientific knowledge and aesthetic enjoyment. Bourrit's narrative, the editor proclaims, seeks to satisfy both: in his observations, Bourrit "gives a truly picturesque description of such scenes, as must have been particularly

striking to the cultivated Taste of a Painter." And while Bourrit makes some observations on the glaciers themselves, the editor concedes that Bourrit could have appended a little more scientific precision to his study (the field of glaciology was just emerging): "it may be wished he had explained himself with more precision, in accounting for those waves of ice, which have such singular appearances; a point in which he leaves the mind not fully satisfied" (xvi-xvii).

The tension that Suffolk points out in the preface is a recurrent problem the author faces in the pages of the narrative itself: how to describe in a narrative picture an object such as a glacier, whose very existence and structure had only recently been apprehended by natural historians? Bourrit in turn relies on metaphor and concrete observation to attempt to transpose the image of the glacier from his sight to the mind's eye of the reader. In his description of Mont Blanc (whose summit had still not been reached by any climber up to this point), Bourrit attempts to account for the difficulty of explaining the object of the mountain as a whole:

> An obelisk of one hundred yards, appears of a prodigious height, yet we can form a tolerable idea of it from recollection or imagination only; but when that height is thirty or nearly forty times increased, upon a base proportionally massive, which yet the eye can take in at one view, the mind is almost lost in the sublimity of its own idea, and no tongue whatever is capable of describing, and conveying to others, the successively humiliating, elevated, awful feelings of the soul, upon the sight of such an object. (8-9)

Though published in 1773, Bourrit's work reads like a proto-Kantian version of the sublime, in which the power of the mind to comprehend (barely) the massive object becomes a source of humiliation, elevation and awe-fullness itself. The difficulty of translating the object into prose becomes, instead, a problem of describing the feeling and the effect of the sublime upon the mind itself. For Kant, the object of the sublime isn't the mountain, but the mind's ability to comprehend the size, scale or greatness of the natural object.

In addition to experimenting in aesthetic theory, Bourrit's observations of the glaciers in the Western Alps combine melodic description at the same time as he hazards a guess at the reason for their appearance. In the valley of des Bois, Bourrit details the great glacier of the Mer de Glace:

> A sea violently agitated by a storm, and arrested by a severe sudden frost, might well represent the appearance of this Glacier; the waves, hardened by succeeding winters, are some of them a dirty, and other of a clear white, divided by oblique fissures, which appear of a transparent blue. The waters murmur as they run along these clefs, several of which are very deep, and new ones frequently are opening; the prelude to these new ones, is a loud bursting noise, and probably the melting away of some parts at the bottom of the Glacier, occasions the cracking upon its surface. (67)

Bourrit attempts to describe the appearance of crevasses to those who may not have seen them before as though the formation itself was the result of a kind of violent action caught or "arrested" mid-scene. Though inhabitants of the Alpine regions had noticed the motion of glaciers for centuries, scientists were just beginning to posit theories as to the

source and cause of their movement. In the quoted text, Bourrit suggests that the water running below the glacier heats up the ice above it, causing the cracks that appear as crevasses on the surface. In this paragraph, the reader gets to experience the glacier as a moving, dramatic ocean of ice, though the movements of the glaciers themselves are often imperceptible beyond the sound Bourrit describes as a "loud bursting noise" that he posits results from crevasses forming.

For five-and-a-half hours, Bourrit and his companions labored up the ridge of Le Brévent (2525m), scrambling over large boulders and blocks that had tumbled down the mountain. The Swiss physicist Saussure had climbed this passage earlier, with the help of a Swiss guide who now led Bourrit and his companions. Bourrit dramatizes the difficulty of the ascent in the kind of language still found in mountaineering narratives today:

> It was infinite labour; the sweat ran down our faces; the instant we thought ourselves sometimes perfectly safe, in having grasped the solid rock, the edge would deceive us, and break off in our hands, or the stone upon which we set our foot would scape, and were carried down with the rubbish; but these accidents, which might have been attended with bad consequences (as we came off unhurt) rather animated than discouraged us, and became at last a matter of amusement. (56-57)

As incapable as the viewer is of grasping the image of a mountain as massive as Mont Blanc from afar, so, too, are the climbers challenged to actually perceive the reality of the material in front of them: they grasp at "solid rock," but it crumbles under their hands and feet. The passage furthermore places the men in the position of heroic defiance, the dangers they face become an "amusement" rather than a severe or serious obstacle.

The mountaineer becomes a stand-in for scientific explorer continues when the climbers reach the summit. “The fatigues of travellers are not always fully rewarded,” Bourrit writes, “but these difficulties over, what beauties were displayed around us!” As he surveys the scene below, Bourrit positions the view from that of a detached, transcendent eye: “the eye surveys with ravishment the gills of ice, and the several Glaciers extending almost into the plain, whilst this appears like an artificial garden, embellished with the mixture of a variety of colors” (59). The prospect of making it to the highest peak in the range is an inducement from both the perspective of a scientific observer and a picturesque traveller. In a footnote, the author wonders at the “picture” spread below him: “What would it be then could we ascend the summit of Mont Blanc?” (59 fn.).

In taking to the heights, Bourrit combined objective observation about the climb and the summits with his subjective responses to the effects of the scenery. Most often these responses were called into being at precipitous views. In an early passage of the lower peaks of the Savoy, Bourrit happens upon a waterfall on a ridgeline. From there, he notes, he and his companions were able to glimpse both the mountain above, and the scenery below. The views, he writes, “offer to the man of taste and sentiment, a composition of objects that touches him, and gives his mind a satisfaction and a pleasure, which may be felt much better than it can possibly be described” (28). The application of more precise measurements may help the observer describe the scene and the mountain in more detail, but Bourrit and his companions do not stop to bother with these measurements. Later, on the summit of of Le Brévent above the valley of Chamonix,

Bourrit again returns to the notion of the failure of language at giving an accurate picture of what the climbers had glimpsed from the apex from the peak:

> It was not without regret that we saw the moment arrive, when we must quit this scene: we threw one parting glance over all those magnificent objects; which we never could be tired with surveying. We looked at one another, in expressive silence; our eyes alone could speak what we had seen, and told what passed in our hearts; they were affected beyond the power of utterance. (74)

Rather than attempt to embellish a report of the grand scenery below, Bourrit states that the most "expressive" form of communication between the mountaineers was "silence": their "eyes alone could speak what [they] had seen." Again Bourrit presumes that language fails to convey the general impression of the mountain experience. Failing that, however, Bourrit becomes more methodical in his description: "Having taken this general survey of the Glaciers," he writes, "we determined to spend the rest of our time in examining the construction of each of them particularly, and to begin with the valley of ice called des Bois" (75). A more methodical, measured approach to the experience might begin to convey the grandeur of the landscape to the reader.

One of Bourrit's contemporaries and his patron, Horace Bénédict de Saussure, believed that mountain climbs and views could not only be expressed in scientific language, but that the steady observation from summits could lead to discovering a "Theory of the Earth." The seventeenth-century English theological Thomas Burnett had provoked discussion of this idea in his text, *The Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1684). Burnett's work, as Marjorie Hope Nicolson explained in *Mountain Gloom and Mountain*

Glory, was meant "less to reconcile science and religion than to prove that science offered another Revelation compatible with Scriptural accounts" (188). For Saussure in 1779, the meaning of this phrase "the theory of the earth" would've been informed by the work of the eighteenth-century French naturalist, George-Louis Leclerc, the Comte de Buffon, whose *L'époques de la Nature* (1778) contained the "first attempted secular history of the Earth," as Buffon considered the questions of the age of the planet (Buffon had estimated around 75,000 years) and how was it formed (Zalasiewicz et. al, xxv).[53]

In his Preface to *Voyage dans les Alps* (1779), Saussure proclaimed, "It is above all through the study of mountains that the progress of a Theory of the Earth can be accelerated" (286). In his biography, *The Life of Horace Benedict de Saussure*, writer Douglas Freshfield suggests that Saussure's mountain excursions were solely motivated by scientific aims:

> It has always to be borne in mind that with de Saussure climbing—except perhaps in the case of Mont Blanc, and even with Mont Blanc only in private moments—was considered not as an end in itself, but as a means to scientific research. […] De Saussure's aim was always serious. He appreciated in his leisure moments—no one more thoroughly—the beauty of the storehouses of snow and the splendors to be seen on the summits. His descriptions of the view from the Crammont and his last sunset on the Col du Geant remain as evidence of his feeling for mountain effects. But scenery was not in his case, as it is with us, a first object. He did not find

[53] A decade after Saussure's book appeared, James Hutton would suggest a timeline for the age of the earth that far extended Buffon's or anyone else's timeline: in the question of the age of the earth, Hutton wrote, "we find no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end" (qtd. in Zalasiewicz et. al, xxv).

> in it an adequate inducement to face obstacles far more serious in imagination, but also more serious in reality, than those we encounter today. (284-5)

Freshfield acknowledges that, at times, Saussure was capable of appreciating the mountain views and scenic revelations of the Alpine landscape. Historian Peter H. Hansen offers a different reading of Saussure's primary aims in the *Voyages dans les Alps*: not only did Saussure seek to understand how mountains contributed to the formation of the globe, but how "to find the language appropriate for the summit position of the natural philosopher who 'seems to dominate above our Globe'" (58). Bourrit's observations on the summit of the Buet failed to suggest greater significance for the Theory of the Earth, Hansen explains, tilting the balance of the material within Bourrit's travel narratives toward the more "diverting" than instructional, as the editor of Bourrit's volume had observed. Yet by situating Saussure's summit outlook as a problem of language, Hansen quotes from a 1774 treatise of Saussure to further make this point: "Even in this century, which is said to have arrogated the title of the *century of things,* it is words that govern us. Society is divided into small cabals, each of which scoffs at the sound of a certain *word*. Cry against superficial knowledge and you hear a hundred voiced raised in your favor. Why? Because there are indeed superficial men" (*Eclaircissemens sur le Projet de Reforme pur le College de Geneve* qtd. in Hansen 60).

In his Preface to the *Voyages dans les Alps*, Saussure articulated the need for careful observation in the field before the natural scientist attempted to draw conclusions about theories or natural laws that governed the earth:

> All those who have studied attentively the materials of the earth which we inhabit have been forced to recognize that our globe has suffered great revolutions which must have required for their accomplishment … The philosopher of antiquity…more eager to interpret nature than patient in her study…relied on inadequate observations and on traditions distorted by poetry and superstition, and thus were led to invent Cosmogonies, or Systems of the origin of the World, better suited to please the imagination than to satisfy the intellect by a faithful interpretation of nature. It was long before it was recognized that this branch of Natural Science, like all others, ought to be pursued with the help of observation, and that systems out never to be put forward except as the results and the consequences of facts. (qtd. in Freshfield, 286)

Saussure offered the figure of the mountaineer as a perfect analogy for the role of the natural historian. But in Saussure's language, the work of the mountaineer is more than a metaphor for the burgeoning role of the Romantic scientist: it is also a mandate. The passage is worth quoting at length:

> It is in vain, however, that mountains offer opportunities for such observations if the student does not know how to look on these great objects as a whole and in their more general relations. The one object of the greater number of the travellers who style themselves Naturalists is to collect curiosities; they walk, or rather they crawl, their eyes fixed on the ground, picking up little fragments, without making any attempt at generalization. […] It is not that I advise neglect of detailed observations;

> on the contrary, I regard them as the only base of solid knowledge; what I ask is that, in observing details, one should never lose sight of the masses as a whole. […] One must leave the beaten track and climb the lofty peaks whence the eyes can embrace at once a multitude of objects. These excursions are, I admit, laborious; one must do without carriages, or even horses, endure great fatigue, and even at times expose oneself to somewhat serious risk. Often the Naturalist on the point of reaching a peak which he eagerly desires to gain is seized with doubt whether his strength will carry him to the top, or whether he can succeed in conquering the cliffs that bar his way; but the brisk and fresh air he breathes sense through his veins a tonic which restores him, and the hope of the great spectacle he is about to enjoy, and of the new discoveries which he may gain, reanimate his vigor and his courage. He arrives; his eyes, at once dazzled and drawn in every direction, know not at first where to fix themselves; little by little he accustoms himself to this great light; he selects the objects which ought to principally occupy him, and he decides on the order in which he should study them. (286-87)

By insisting that the natural scientist retain the view of the earth as a "whole" while collecting curiosities, Saussure fits into the proto-Romanticist trend of his explorer contemporaries. Saussure critiques the short-sighted naturalists who neglect the larger picture and "crawl" on the ground, whereas the proper Naturalist will climb up to the summit. This prescription of Saussure's for the naturalist to proceed in his discipline with the moves and intention of a climber starts as a metaphor: the Naturalist shouldn't crawl,

with their faces pressed to the ground. Rather, they should walk; better yet, climb and, upon "arriving" at the summit, they will see the landscape spread out before them, maintaining the vision of the small and the particular within the larger scope of the whole. The Romantic mountaineer/naturalist, as figured in the above passage, climbs alone, facing "great fatigue" and "serious risk." By the preface, however, the metaphor has turned into a mandate: Naturalists should become climbers. Saussure reiterates this aim toward the end of the Preface: "If my descriptions give my readers some part of the pleasure I have had myself in my travels—above all, if they were to incite in some of them a desire to study and to advance a science in the progress of which I take an eager interest, I shall be well pleased and well rewarded for my exertions" (287).

Saussure's narrative not only discusses his observations and theories of mountain formation, he includes moments of Romantic delight in the subjective curiosity and pleasure of experiencing the aesthetic landscape itself. Saussure recounts *"the pleasures tasted by* those who devote themselves to the study of mountains"; the "*thrill* that I experienced the first time that my hands clasped the rocks of the Saleve and my *eyes enjoyed* its panorama"; the drive of "curiosity" that stoked in him a "*burning […] desire* to see close at hand the High Alps" (289-90, emphasis added). To Saussure, his personal, subjective reactions to the landscape were as much a part of his scientific observations as the data he collected from his barometer and altimeter. Embellishment is not required for relaying the narrative: in a comment on the style of his prose, Saussure reflects, "I know its faults"; yet, he clarifies, this is because he has become "more accustomed to climb rocks than to turn and polish phrases, my only object has been to describe clearly what I have seen and felt."

William Bartram among the Southern Hills

In April 1773, when Bourrit published his book about his Alpine travels, across the Atlantic, botanist and natural historian William Bartram set out for the province of South Carolina on the instructions to discover "rare and useful productions of nature, chiefly in the vegetable kingdom" (27). While this was his ostensible aim, as ordered by his patron, Bartram also had larger theories in mind. Like the figure of Saussure's heroic natural scientist, Bartram trekked through the Southern provinces of the New World and made a few mountain climbs during his travels. Though the altitudes Bartram gained are small in comparison to his Alpine counterparts, Bartram's narrative shares many similarities with that of the emergent genre of mountaineering literature and the literary productions of Romantic science. Climbing mountains to look for new specimens, he also was sensible to the beauties of the summit view, and remarked on the subjective response to the landscape throughout his work, *Travels Through North and South Carolina, Georgia, East and West Florida* (1791). Not a mere "crawler," according to Sausserian terms, Bartram also sought to understand a larger theory of the earth. In the introduction to his *Travels*, Bartram outlines a theory of plants, or "vegetable beings" as he refers to them, as "endued with some sensible faculties or attributes, similar to those that dignify animal nature; they are organical, living, and self-moving bodies," capable of both "motion and volition" (17). This position fits squarely within the characteristics of Romantic science, as a reaction against the mechanical, Descartian view of nature, which upheld that animals (and plants) were machines. Bartram posits, instead, that even "vegetable beings" have sensitive faculties.

Christoph Irmscher's monograph, *The Poetics of Natural History* (1999) demonstrated how the pursuits of science and literature coexisted in the writings of Bartram and other early American natural historians. But as Irmscher noted at the time, classifying Bartram's *Travels* within one genre—imaginative or descriptive—is a hopeless endeavor. On the one hand, as Irmscher wrote, some modern scholars view *Travels* as "a work of art," while others "believ[e] that is it is first and foremost a 'work of science'" (37). Even during Bartram's day, some contemporary readers rejected his book as a contribution to natural history, questioning the "rhapsodical effusions" as "very incorrect," and objecting to his "disgustingly pompous style" (quoted in Irmscher, 37). Common to other travel and exploration narratives at the time, Bartram's work, Irmscher delightfully comments, is "a ragbag of unreconcilable genres," with passages that alternate from "taxonomic classification, botanical description, ethnographic field note, narrative report, or lyrical vignettes"; sometimes even combining them into the same sentence (39). The paradoxical nature of these competing genres, Chrisotpher Iannini argues in *Fatal Revolutions*, are part of what makes Bartram's narrative resonate with proto-Romantic writing: "To perceive the true nature of the landscape requires a synthesis of empiricism and idealism, combining accurate description of concrete particulars with the exercise of imagination or intuition" (209).[54] Similarly, Mark Sturges suggests that *Travels* is a work of "epistemic overlap," from the eighteenth-century project of classification and categorization, and emergent, specialized disciplines (58). "Following Burke," Sturges writes, "Bartram marveled at the sublime quality of nature,

[54] According to Alan Bewell's *Natures in Translation* (2017), Bartram's book also greatly inspired the Romantic poets Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Shelley, who read Bartram's botanical catalogues as poems. These poets, in turn, also contributed to the development of Mountain aesthetics and tourism (Wordsworth with his guidebook to the Lake District, Shelley the famous poem on Mont Blanc.

the simultaneous awe and terror of dangerous scenes […] As a scientist, he attempted to reconcile these emotional responses with the empirical project of natural history" (58).

While many readers of Bartram have commented on the hybrid nature of his work, studies have neglected Bartram's mountain sensibility and his interest in summit scenes. In mountaineering studies, as well, little attention has been paid to Bartram's climbing scenes or mountain observations; however, these moments in Bartram's *Travels* are revealing of the naturalist's theory of the earth. Bartram's mountain scenes also are important for the discourse of the sublime. Bartram attempts to describe the impact of mountain scenery on the viewer while also noting difficulty of translating sublime scenery into language. Bartram's descriptions depend on analogy and metaphor, where the landscapes of mountains and oceans become reflexive of one another. The narrative of Bartram's *Travels* begins almost immediately following Bartram's departure down the river and then into the Atlantic Ocean, where a severe storm quickly arises. The narration of the storm, at first, appears to have nothing to do with the botanical project at hand, or with Bartram's greater observations about the vitality of the earth: "The powerful winds, now rushing forth from their secret abodes, suddenly spread terror and devastation; and the wide ocean, which, a few moments past, was gentle and placid, is now thrown into disorder, and heaped into mountains, whose white curling crests seem to sweep the skies!" (27). Like Bourrit's description of the Mer de Glace, Bartram uses the familiar scene of a jagged ridge of mountains in the distance to describe the seeming chaos of the storm encountered on the ocean, transformed into great peaks that toss about. Later in the *Travels*, Bartram will reverse this analogy, using the motion and waves of the ocean as the vehicle to describe a mountainous landscape. From a position up high in the Cherokee

mountains, Bartram describes the view of the hills below: "The mountain wilderness which I had lately traversed […] appearing regularly undulated as the great ocean after a tempest" (274). The notion of the mountains as a moving part of the landscape resurfaces after Bartram views the effects of a storm on the valley: "the lofty forests bend low beneath its fury; their limbs and wavy boughs are tossed about and catch hold of each other; the mountains seem to tremble and reel about, and the ancient hills to be shaken to their foundations" (288). By comparing the ocean to mountains upon mountains and comparing mountains to the ocean, Bartram's analogies and metaphors for these landscapes become self-reflexive, indicating the difficulty of describing what he has called the "sublime" in the landscape.

Bartram's mountain summit views help inform this notion of the interconnectedness of the landscape. Bartram's language in mountain travels in Georgia repeats the familiar tropes of Romantic science: the notion of the natural scientist as a heroic explorer, facing risk in the pursuit of knowledge, and the expression of wonder at the natural world. In Georgia, Bartram becomes impatient for the Native guide to arrive, he ventures into the mountains alone, "determined" to "run all risks" in pursuit of his object (274). Bartram shuffles through a thick, shadowed forest, its atmosphere humid and verdant as the songs of birds flit through the leaves, to the apex of the landscape:

> My next flight was up a very high peak, to the top of the Occonne mountain, where I rested; and turning about, found that I was now in a very elevated situation, from whence I enjoyed a view inexpressibly magnificent and comprehensive. The mountains wilderness which I had lately traversed, down to the region of Augustus, appearing regularly

> undulated […]; the undulations gradually depressing, yet perfectly regular, as the squama of fish, or imbrications of tile on a roof; the nearest ground to me of a perfect full green; next more glaucous, and lastly almost blue as the ether with which the most distant curve of the horizon seemed to be blended. (275-6)

Again in this passage, Bartram attempts to convey the difficulty of explaining what he truly sees from the heights: the view is "inexpressibly magnificent and comprehensive." In attempting to describe the landscape before him, Bartram turns to the scientific language of botany to create new metaphors and analogies for the way the landscape appears to undulate across the steppe, with the terms, "squama," (a term interchangeable in botany and zoology for "scale"); "imbrications" (according to an 1831 entry in the *OED*, in which "edges […] overlap each other, presenting the appearance of imbrication, to use the language of botanists") and "glaucous" (again according to the *OED*, "of a dull or pale green colour passing into greyish blue; spec. in *Botany* covered with 'bloom'"). By extending botanical terminology to the surface of the earth and the mountains themselves, Bartram demonstrates how descriptive, scientific terminology might help to address the problem encountered at moment of the sublime: the passing over into the liminal stage in which sights and their power to overwhelm the viewer become inexpressible.

The problem of finding language to express the view from the summit position continues as Bartram resumes climbing. Upon reaching another apex, Bartram struggles to focus on the tender branches and leaves about him as the grand horizon threatens to overwhelm his senses and vision:

> My imagination thus wholly engaged in the contemplation of this magnificent landscape, infinitely varied, and without bound, I was almost insensible or regardless of the charming objects more within my reach: a new species of Rhododendron foremost in the assembly of mountain beauties; next the flaming Azalea, Kalmia latifolia, incarnate Robinia, snowy mantled Philadelphus inodorus, perfumed Calycanthus, &c. (276)

The "magnificent landscape" so "engages" Bartram's "imagination" that he appears almost incapable of seeing the literal specimens at his feet. The imagination and the senses appear almost in conflict with each other in this passage; but Bartram is not so overcome with the view that he fails to notice (and make note of) the specimens around him; however, the inclusion of "&c.", short for "and etcetera" at the end of many Bartram passages, turns the landscape from at first the tone of the utterly unfamiliar—"magnificent" and "infinitely varied", to that of the assumption of the wholly familiar, as implied by the short note, "&c." Following this summit view, Bartram continues through another pass and onto the next summit, which he names "Mount Magnolia," after "a new and beautiful species of that celebrated family of flowering trees," Magnolia auriculata (mountain magnolia) which he encountered frequently during the hike. In his analysis of Bartram's text, Christoph Irmscher looks to this example of a description of "Magnolia auriculata' the mountain magnolia" as it embodies Bartram literary technique of "dynamic stasis" to describe a botanical specimen (39). Such "dynamic stasis" is also present in the descriptions of the mountain scenery that Bartram notices, perhaps even more significant for their size and grandeur: "the towering mountains seem continuously in motion as I pass along, pompously raising their superb crests towards the lofty skies,

traversing the far distant horizon"; and yet again, with: "ridges of hills rising grand and sublimely one above and beyond another, some boldly and majestically advancing into the verdant plain, their feet bathed with the silver flood of the Tanase, whilst others far distant, veiled in blue mists, sublimely mountain aloft, with yet greater majesty life up their pompous crests, and overlook vast regions" (288). In the end, Bartram meets Saussure's mandate to notice the particular (species of plants) while also climbing to the top for an authoritative view.

Humboldt's Summit Enthusiasm

Perhaps no figure better embodies the spirit of the Romantic scientist than Alexander von Humboldt. William Goetzmann coined the term "Humboldtian science" to describe the method and proliferation of Humboldt's natural philosophy. Goetzmann explained, the followers of Humboldt "always looked for underlying patterns, unities, and laws which linked all parts of the globe and cosmos, practically, philosophically, aesthetically and spiritually" (Goetzmann 53, quoted in Walls 126). "Humboldtian science," Laura Dassow Walls explains, can be summarized by the basic tenets of "Explore, Collect, Measure, Connect" (111-2). Essentially, according to Goetzmann, "'Humboldtian science' [is] synonymous with 'romantic science'" (Goetzmann 54). However, as recent studies of Romantic science in literary and cultural studies have shown, the discipline of the history of science has been wary to employ the term "Romantic science." As Richard Holmes explains, "Romanticism as a cultural force is generally regarded as intensely hostile to science, its ideal of subjectivity eternally opposed to that of scientific objectivity. … The notion of *wonder* seems to be something that once united them, and can still do so. In effect there is Romantic science in the same

sense that there is Romantic poetry, and often for the same enduring reasons" (xvi). More recent studies of Romantic science claim Humboldt as a foundational figure. In his introduction to *Romanticism and Science,* Tim Fulford writes: "Humboldt was not just a collector but also a Romantic scientist in that he tried to account for all the relationships within a total environment—to assess the elements, including his own subjective presence, as contributions to an organic whole (no less a response to Kant's aesthetics than were the organicist poetics of Romantic poets" (7).

Studies in recent decades have depicted Humboldt in the role of the "heroic scientist": as Vera Kutzinski writes, Humboldt's "passion for climbing" numbered among several other excursions depicted as "daring exploits in the Americas" (102). An accomplished mountaineer himself, Humboldt became famous for achieving the altitude record for his era on Chimborazo (19,286 feet in 1802). Though he lamented that the climb resulted in little useful data, the record stood for another thirty years. But scholarly interest in Humboldt's mountaineering exploits has only surfaced within the last ten years; even then, it remains minimally focused on the Chimborazo climb, rather than his ascent of the Peak of Teneriffe: a climb that Humboldt considered of far more scientific value than the altitude he reached on Chimborazo.

On his ascent of the mountain, Humboldt was able to observe that the entirety of the island of Teneriffe bore resemblance to the structure of the mountain itself. On the ascent (guided by local *neveros*, persons who "collect ice and snow to sell in the neighboring towns") Humboldt moved through different climactic and geological zones, surprised by the contrast he witnessed between the green vegetation up high on the mountain and the barren plain of volcanic rock below. Looking toward the summit,

Humboldt witnesses the "magnificent" picture of the rocks against the sky, "a firmament of darkest view" (154). Humboldt and his companions continued up to the highest peak on the island, which he calls the Peak of Teneriffe, where "no traveller, furnished with instruments, had as yet taken […] an observation" (159). Here Humboldt encountered the most difficult technical climbing of the trip: it took his party thirty minutes to ascent ninety feet of steep, volcanic rock: only one climb Humboldt ever encountered was more difficult, and that was because the top section of that volcano was a loose, powdery silt.

In his writing in *Personal Narrative* about the climb on the Peak of Teneriffe, Humboldt begins to show his characteristic theory of the later *Cosmos* at work: from the perspective of a climber and Romantic scientist, Humboldt begins to weave together grand, arching theories about patterns that governed the earth. Descriptions of nature, Humboldt wrote in *Cosmos*, should be scientifically accurate "without being deprived thereby of the vivifying breath of imagination." This form of writing and observation can be seen Humboldt's discussion of the expedition to the apex of Teneriffe:

> An expedition to the summit of the volcano of Teneriffe is interesting, not solely on account of the great number of phaenomena which are the objects of scientific research; it has still greater attractions from the picturesque beauties, which it lays open to those who are feeling alive to the majesty of nature. *It is a difficult task, to describe those sensations*, which act with so much the more force as they have something undefined, produced by the immensity of the space as well as by the greatness, the novelty, and the multitude of objects, amidst which we find ourselves transported. When a traveller attempts to furnish descriptions of the

> loftiest summits of the Globe, the cataracts of the great rivers, the tortuous vallies of the Andes, he is exposed to the danger of fatiguing his readers by the monotonous expression of his admiration. It appears to be more conformable to the plan, which I have proposed to myself in this narrative to indicate the peculiar character that distinguishes each zone, we exhibit with more clearness the physiognomy of the landscape, in proportion as we endeavor to sketch its individual features, to compare them with each other, and discover by this kind of analysis the sources of those enjoyments, which are offered us by the great picture of nature. (178-9)

In this passage, Humboldt turns to the individual description of the object at hand in order to attempt to meld together a complete vision of the whole, to "describe those sensations" that one who "feel[s] alive to the majesty of nature" must encounter. Humboldt proposes that various sections of the earth form a "physiognomy"; later, he notes that similar altitudes will have similar characteristics. Like Saussure's description of the naturalist climber, Humboldt ascends to the top of the Peak of Teneriffe to observe the geography of plants beginning to make sense to him:

> From the summit of these solitary regions our eyes hovered over an inhabited world; we enjoyed the striking contrast between the bare sides of the Peak, its steep declivities covered with scoriae, its elevated plains destitute of vegetation, and the smiling aspect of the country beneath; we beheld the plants divided by zones, as the temperature of the atmosphere diminished with the height of the site. Below the Piton, lichens begin to cover the scorious lava with lustered surface […] it take the lead not only

> of the other herbaceous plants, but even of the gramina, which in the Alps and on the top of the ridge of the Cordilleras, form close neighborhood with the plants of the family of cryptogamia. (180)

Humboldt's climb to the top of Teneriffe and his multitude of observations were instrumental in forming his theory of the earth. However, in recent years, scholars have paid more attention to Humboldt's "failure" on the much-higher peak of Chimborazo. Vera Kutzinski suggests that "the very top of Chimborazo […] represented the quintessential sublime" to Humboldt. "What was a personal disappointment for him nonetheless added significantly to his worldwide fame, because he literally went where no human had (then) gone before" (Vera 106). Andrea Wulf's 2016 biography of Humboldt, *The Invention of Nature*, begins with a scene of Humboldt struggling to that same summit. In his essay, "Everything is interrelated, even errors in the system," German scholar Ottmar Ette suggests that Humboldt's failure to reach the summit of Chimborazo was emblematic of a greater "art of failure" that Humboldt perfected in his scientific and writerly life: "Humboldt tried to make precisely those failings fruitful as a fuel for his scientific thinking and acting, for his epistemology as much as his scientific practice. The Humboldtian art of failure is an art of living. It aims at the happiness that comes with not reaching the top, at arriving nowhere" (121). What Ette seems to forget in this passage is that, though Humboldt may have been disappointed at not reaching the summit, the achievement of the altitude record was a success in and of itself, regardless of the difficulty of the summit. The news of Humboldt's achievement circulated worldwide: when he returned to Europe, Humboldt was often pressed to regale audiences on his lecture tours with the story of the Chimborazo climb, much to his chagrin. In her

article “Who Measures the World? Alexander von Humboldt’s Chimborazo Climb in the Literary Imagination,” Caroline Schauman discusses the influence that stories of Humboldt’s attempt on that mountain had on other works of art, including a 1807 drawing by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe that depicts the scientist “as heroically reconnoitering a new world” (448). Humboldt never got around to writing a detailed account of the Chimborazo attempt in his multiple volumes of the *Personal Narrative*; rather, the first trip report appeared in a short essay in 1838, over thirty years after his famed ascent. Humboldt later revised the essay for his volume *Kleinere Schriften* (Shorter Writings) in 1853, in which he recalls with exhaustion the public curiosity that attended his 1802 attempt:

> Chimborazo has been the tedious subject of all questions that were posed to me when I first returned to Europe. The exploration of the most important laws of nature; the most vivid description of the plant zones and the climatic differences that affect agriculture—those issues were hardly ever able to steer attention away from the snow-capped mountain that, in those days […] was deemed the absolute pinnacle of the span of the Andes chain. (Kutzinski 192)

By 1838, Humboldt began to believe that the utility of climbing the highest peaks of the world held little value for science. During the Chimborazo climb, Humboldt and his companions were caught in a thick cloud as they progressed up the ridge. Soon it began to snow. Unable to see the summit ahead of them, they could neither see to the rocks below, as they were tromping through ice and permanent snow fields. Neither could they see “any of the neighboring snow-capped mountains; and even less so the

highlands of Quito," Humboldt wrote. "It was as if we were trapped inside an air balloon" (199). Hardly any biotic life survived above the permanent snow line, Humboldt remarked. By 1853, Humboldt was motivated to write, "Nowadays, there is hardly any scientific interest in the efforts of traveling physicists who try to reach the earth's highest peaks; but curiosity about them has remained very much alive in the popular imagination. What appears unreachable exerts a mysterious pull; one wants to know that everything is at least being tried, even if it does not lead to success" (192). The notion of the Romantic scientist begins to be tarnished, as well: it no longer seems worth it for the scientist to pursue the summit (or knowledge) regardless of the dangers they might face. Humboldt recounts an episode from Bossingault, his companion's, narrative:

> "The snow, on which we had to tread, was very soft and only three to four inches deep on top of a smooth, hard crust of ice. We had to cut steps into it. A black man went first in order to perform this labor, which soon exhausted his strength. When I tried to pass him and to relieve him, I slipped and, fortunately, Colonel Hall and the black man himself grabbed me.'' ''For a moment,'' Mr Boussingault adds, ''all three of us were in serious danger. Farther on, the snow was more favorable; and at 3.45 in the afternoon, we were finally standing on the long-anticipated ridge which was a few feet wide but surrounded by chasms." The loss of a physicist like Boussingault would have been extraordinarily costly compared to the small benefits that endeavors of this sort can contribute to the sciences. (202)

Eventually, Humboldt would conclude, “Regrettably, I think, the highest points of the massive rises are isolated phenomena, even if they, like the fruitless climbs of high snow-capped mountains, fascinate people no end” (202).

Humboldt began to draw value away from the claim of the first or the highest summit; rather, he noted that the lower-elevation peaks could be more useful to the scientific explorer: “Travellers have learnt by experience, that views from the summits of very lofty mountains are neither so beautiful, picturesque, nor varied as those from heights which do not exceed that of Vesuvius, Rigi, and the Puy-de-Dome. Colossal mountains, such as Chimborazo, Antisana, or Mount Rose, compose so large a mass, that the plains covered with rich vegetation are seen only in the immensity of distance, where a blue and vapory tint is uniformly spread over the landscape” (202). Humboldt’s growing disenchantment with mountain summits is a symptom of the end of the era of Romantic science in the mountains that began with Saussure. As scientists no longer emphasized reaching the summit, and no longer felt the need or possibility to master all the various disciplines of science and integrate them into one theory (as has been Humboldt’s ambition nearly all his career). (By this point, Humboldt was also very likely tired of everyone asking him about Chimborazo, and the limited fruits that summit expeditions produced helped him consider mountaineering as more of a diversion or recreation, not a science.)

By drawing attention to more modest summits, Humboldt’s remark also foreshadows the Thoreauvian idea that people didn’t have to venture far to encounter the wild—there were enough mysteries in the succession of plants and behavior of animals in the woods and hills surrounding Concord. Thoreau was not the only mountaineer and

naturalist to be inspired by Humboldt: before he made a famous voyage aboard the *Beagle,* Charles Darwin wrote in a letter to his sister, "I never will be easy till I see the peak of Tenerife and the great dragon tree" written to his sister Caroline during his last year at Cambridge" (qtd. in Holmes 461).

The Legacy of Romanticism in Mountaineering

In September of 1833, Charles Darwin made what he believed to be the first foreign ascent of two of the four peaks of the Sierra de la Ventana in Argentina. Lured by local murmurs of untold caves, forests, and beds of silver and gold on the mountain, Darwin set out to climb alone one September morning. The gaucho he had hired to guide him across 400 miles of the Pampas plains from Bahia Blanca to Buenos Aires suggested to Darwin that he might be able to mount the nearby ridge to gain access the summit. The climb up to ridge itself was difficult, even for the naturalist who had spent the previous year voyaging around making notes of various plant and animal life diverse places. But as Darwin writes in *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1845), even making the climb over the "rough rocks" to the ridge was "very fatiguing." "At last, when I reached the ridge," Darwin notes, "my disappointment was extreme in finding a precipitous valley as deep as the plain, which cut the chain transversely in two, and separated me from the four points." After yet another arduous set of climbs, he reached the first and second summits by early afternoon. Looking out over the plain in the early Argentine spring, Darwin's eyes would've likely met with soft, verdant waves of grassland, dotted with swallows, stretching out towards the ocean. He, however, found the view from the peak wholly unsatisfactory. "I was… disappointed with this ascent," Darwin writes. "Even the view was insignificant;—a plain like the sea, but without its beautiful color and defined

outline." Summiting the remaining two peaks was no longer appealing, for he had already ascertained that the geology did not vary across the Sierra.

Uninspiring views didn't keep Darwin from upholding his reputation as a climbing enthusiast with a seemingly-incurable wanderlust his father thought would prevent him from settling down after circumnavigating the globe. Yet for Darwin, summiting mountains sometimes resulted in breaking their enchantment. A year after Darwin's disappointing first ascent, while the *Beagle* sat in Port Famine of Tierra del Fuego, he and his companions set out to climb Mount Tarn. Their trek began through the thickest woods, while the terrain gradually turned into a "death-like scene of desolation [that] exceeded all description." Finally reaching the summit, Darwin's description of the view below appears, not aesthetic in nature, but oddly clinical. In a view "characteristic of Tierra del Fuego," Darwin notes "irregular chains of hills, mottled with patches of snow, deep yellowish-green valleys, and arms of the sea intersecting the land in many directions," before descending back into the "somber and dull" forest below.

The Mount Tarn ascent was bookmarked by brief glimpses of a "sublime spectacle," as a veil of mist slowly peeled back to reveal the "noble" Mount Sarmiento. Darwin didn't attempt a climb of the peak (a first ascent wasn't established until 1956), but I wonder if he would've had the same reaction to the views atop the Sierra de la Ventana and Mount Tarn. Writing of his 1831-1836 voyage in his biography later in life, Darwin felt the remembered impression of the thick, tropical flora more keenly than the craggy summits and devastating peaks he encountered during his travels.

The Romantic strain of early mountain exploration has continued today, even as scientific motivation has almost entirely disappeared from the pursuit. In the middle of

the nineteenth-century, the inheritors of the Romantic science tradition would believe that isolated observations in the laboratory, from numbering cells under a microscope to counting stamens on a flower, contributed to a mechanized vision of nature. "The earth is not a mere fragment of dead history, stratum upon stratum like the leaves of a book, to be studied by geologists and antiquaries chiefly, but living poetry…not a fossil earth, but a living earth," Thoreau wrote in *Walden*. Yet as specialized scientific pursuits rose in prestige at the end of the nineteenth century, more criticism of the generalist approach emerged. Without methodical laboratory analysis, British scientist William Thomson stated in 1885, natural history was "merely looking at external beauties" (qtd. in Wright). In the wake of Romantic science, nature writers like Thoreau never gave up hope that the union of science and imagination, merged from vigilant observation and undisciplined awe, would lead to an integrated theory of nature—one that didn't separate humans from the environment, but that showed how they were profoundly, irrevocably linked.

Today, popular science reporting often pits the activities of climbers against those of conservation biologists. A 1999 article in *Science* noted, "Researchers venturing onto remote bluffs find them to be oases of diversity, but rock climbers are taking out species even as scientists discover them" (Krajick). More recently, 2011 *Science Daily* reported "Climbers leave rare plants' genetic variation on the rocks" (the article elaborates on the metaphorical, not literal, interpretation of that final phrase) (Wiley-Blackwell). But Access Fund Executive Director Brady Robinson believes that climbers are essential to the future of conservation. "As climbers have more and more contact with wild places...the more visceral and intense their experience is, the more likely they are to

dedicate their time, and lives, to protect these places," he reported to *Alpinist* magazine in 2017 (Wright).

The activity of mountaineering has encouraged some climbers to take their scientific studies to the areas they recreate within. Nevertheless, as the authors of *Cliff Ecology* (2001) observe, cliff science is woefully understudied. The "lack of scientific interest is in striking contrast to how common cliffs are around the world," Doug Larson notes, especially given their importance in human history (2). Ecologists' perception of cliffs as liminal spaces, as borders and edges of larger landscape systems, prevents vertical landscapes from being viewed, and studied, as places in their own right. Because they are difficult to access, cliffs are historically one of the few sites historically free from the disturbances that come with human intervention in a landscape, including animal grazing and controlled burns.

On cliffs around the world, climbers have the potential to advance this kind of knowledge. From edge to edge, pocket to pocket, they chart meticulous observations of the landscape as they experience the face of the earth a few feet at a time. Yet within the realm of climbing literature, tales of individual achievement, or even self-discovery, may depict the landscape as a mere backdrop—a resource for material or aesthetic enjoyment—rather than as an environment rich with a multitude of creatures and plant life. In *American Rock*, Don Mellor writes, "I fear, sometimes, that in the frenzied quest for high-end difficulty ratings, we risk seeing our places as simple means to an end" (11). Communities driven by self-involvement, as Thoreau cautioned, will eventually put the land and, by extension, themselves, at risk. In a 1987 talk at the Festival of Mountaineering Literature, British author Dave Cook lamented that climbing writing

appeared to be “running on empty,” he lamented: “The focus of climbing literature concerns has become narrower at a time when its volume has expanded” (18). In order to restore the literary quality and the relevance of climbing literature and mountaineering exploits, Cook writes, accounts of climbs should become more diverse, political, and perhaps, even, scientific: Cook quotes from Norman Nicholson’s foreword to “Speak to the Hills” “Mountains should not serve as an escape from reality. They are surely an escape back to reality” (19). The relevance of climbing, and its literature, may depend on it.

CHAPTER V

CODA

It has been over thirty years since British writer Dave Cook's call for climbing media to become more diverse. Yet gendered, racial and income-level disparities are still prevalent in the climbing and outdoor recreation landscape. While media representation of women in the outdoors has visibly improved, discrepancies in representation of people of color continues.

The articles in this dissertation have focused on the power of the image in the nineteenth century—as a commodity and as an important organizing principle of the early conservation movement as styled by figures like John Muir. The tyranny of the visual has reinforced the aesthetic preference for long vistas over concerns of biodiversity and aesthetically challenging landscapes. Relatedly, Romantic mountaineering's focus on the individual explorer/scientist has elided the knowledge of Indigenous and local guides, whose participation in earliest mountains ascents made them possible.

In *Black Faces, White Spaces*, cultural geographer Carolyn Finney explored how narratives of the environmental movement, beginning with John Muir and Gifford Pinchot, have reified the identification of whiteness with purity discourse and wilderness places, at the same time as the mainstream environmental narrative ignores the experience of people of color, and African Americans in particular, in nature. This convention in environmental discourse is not accidental, she observed: "While Pinchot and Muir explored, articulated, and disseminated conservation and preservation ideologies, legislation was being enacted to limit both movement and accessibility for African Americans, as well as American Indians, Chinese, and other nonwhite peoples in

the United States" (37). In most visible and mainstream environmental and outdoor recreation efforts and media, Finney wrote, "participation in outdoor recreation appears to have primarily a 'white' face"; while "visual representations of wildlands and other green spaces remain largely focused on a Euro-American experience of the environment" (26, 27).

According to the 2018 Outdoor Recreation Report, compiled and published by the Outdoor Foundation, of the estimated 146 million Americans who participated in outdoor recreation in 2017, 75% were white. From the years 2012-2017, participation rates for white and black populations had dropped an average of -0.4%, while participation rates for Asian and Hispanic identifying people had grown by an average of 1%. Nation-wide, participation in climbing continues to grow: of the 781,000 Americans who identified as "core participants" (more than eight times a year), 74% identified as white, whereas white people make up 60.8% of all Americans.

Outdoor activist Teresa Baker advocates for great representation for people of color in outdoor industries and active-outdoor media. In an article for Alpinist online, she reflected, "At times, this work is more than frustrating. I cannot tell you how often I'm told that diversity and inclusion are important to outdoor organizations, brands and publications. And yet, even though new outdoor groups of color pop up daily, non-white faces remain mostly absent from the covers, storylines and social media sites." In attempts to address the demographic disparity in outdoor recreation participation and representation in media, outdoor apparel and gear companies have signed diversity and equity inclusion pledges. The first of its kind, the Diversify Outdoors' pledge (titled the "Outdoor CEO Diversity Pledge") aims to increase representation within companies

themselves, as well as in the companies' media materials and their sponsored athletes. A similar pledge put together by the group Camber Outdoors postulates, "The future of the active-outdoor industries depends on meeting the needs of participants as their demographics and attributes change over time" (6). By referencing the changing demographics of outdoor recreation participants, Camber Outdoors implicitly invokes the statistic put forth by the Census Bureau that estimates that the demographics of America will shift to a majority nonwhite population by the year 2044. In an opinion piece for the *New York Times*, Glenn Nelson speaks to the profit and participation motivation behind the outdoor industry drive to make companies and their advertisements more diverse: "If that new [nonwhite] majority has little or no relationship with the outdoors, then the future of the nation's parks, and the retail and nonprofit ecosystem that surrounds them, will be in trouble."

But this model of corporate investment in outdoor participation is undergirded by racial anxiety about the future of protected landscapes that frames the continuing preservation of wilderness spaces as requiring a transfer of values across racial lines: a problematic assumption that re-inscribes two long-standing myths of American environmentalism; the first being that outdoor recreation is a reliable predictor of environmentalist practice, and the second, which narrowly defines environmentalism as wilderness preservation, and not concern and activism of local air and water quality, and pipeline and nuclear waste dump protests and other instances of resistance rising from movements lead by people of color. This line of reasoning perpetuates the construction of what Sarah Jaquette Ray identifies as "ecological other[s]", who, "unlike ecological

subjects, […] are often those from whose poor decisions and reckless activities the world ostensibly needs to be saved" (5).

In the outdoor recreation industry and media, there is still work to be done, not only to increase representation of people of color, but in sharing stories and experiences of people relating to the environment in non-consumptive, anti-colonialist ways. As Baker writes, "By coming together to create a more inclusive industry, we can better guard against the threats to the environment that affect not only outdoor recreation, but our communities as a whole." A number of grassroots organizations have already formed to create more inclusive spaces in outdoor recreation spaces, including: Outdoor Afro, Brothers of Climbing, Brown Girls Climb, Latinos Outdoors, Indigenous Women Hike, Outdoor Asian, Climbers of Color, Melanin Basecamp, Color the Crag, The Black Outdoors, Natives Outdoors, Unlikely Hikers, and OUT There Adventures—to name a few.

As an editor at a climbing and mountain-culture magazine, I believe in the power of story telling to foment a more just and inclusive future. The pages of *Alpinist* magazine reflect a few ways that climbers are writing against the imperialist strain of mountaineering practice, to reflect stories from the margins and the voices that have been left out of that history, including Indigenous and local guides whose knowledge with the landscape made some of the earliest ascents possible. Climbers as well are imagining or framing new ways of relating to mountains. The cover story for *Alpinist* 66 features an oral history co-composed by Lonnie Kauk, the son of Ahwahneechee descendant and basket maker Lucy Parker and rock climber Ron Kauk, and myself. Through interviews with Lonnie, friends and family, the article weaves together stories of the Indigenous

people of Yosemite and the climbing and Park Service history on that land. Lonnie's grandfather, Ralph Parker, was born and grew up in the Yosemite Valley. In the 1930s the Park Service expelled many Indigenous inhabitants from the valley, mostly Miwok and Paiute villagers. Only those who worked with the Park Service were allowed to remain, relocated to a site of fifteen small, government-built cabins in Wahhoga village. Relocating the villagers, Mark David Spence argues in *Dispossessing the Wilderness*, formed part of a plan to "give park officials unprecedented control of Yosemite's Native community and, over time, achieve the full removal of Indians from the park" (123). As Yosemite's Indigenous employees retired, the Park Service served eviction noticed to their families. Only a few Native villagers remained when the Park Service relocated the last of the employee families to general staff housing and burned the remaining Wahhoga village residences in what the federal agency claimed was part of a firefighter's training exercise.

After the destruction of their village, Indigenous residents of Yosemite and the larger Mariposa County organized as the American Indian Council of Mariposa County. In 1982 they began the process of applying for federal recognition as the Southern Sierra Miwuk Nation. The long, drawn-out process may still be far from the final stages: in November 2018, the Office of Federal Acknowledgment handed down a preliminary finding against official recognition.

Climber Lonnie Kauk grew up in the Yosemite Valley with his family, and approaches climbing as a way to connect with his ancestors, both the Indigenous Yosemite people and his father's legacy as a professional rock climber. For Lonnie,

promoting climbs on social media is a way of presenting his Indigenous ancestors and letting people know that "we're still here."

Lonnie's story is but one of many that counters the mythological narrative of the wilderness as a land empty of history and people. Within such stories that model respectful, non-extractive ways of relating to the environment, perhaps we might find hope for the future of our common home on earth.

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