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TOWARD A NATURAL HISTORY OF READING

Go out there.

- Barry Lopez (*Of Wolves and Men*)

Those of us interested in both literature and the outdoors have welcomed ecocriticism as a justification for our eccentric passions. But does it go far enough? The term has been used thematically, to denote ordinary analysis of writing concerned with environmental issues, and politically, to revisit classics or valorize neglected works by reading them ecocentrically. This sort of criticism has already produced impressive results by opening the canon, revitalizing the curriculum, and deepening our understanding of many great writers. But the underlying method has generally been that used by other schools, namely, close reading of a primary text, mediated by close readings of other, chiefly literary texts. In other words, the "eco" refers more often to the content of the work or the purpose of the critic than it does to the critical method itself.

Thoreau declared that great books should be read in the spirit in which they were written. What would it mean to actually follow this advice? In the case of nature writing and environmental literature in general, what would an ecological method of criticism look like? Scholars have recently begun to explore this question, with fascinating results. According to Lawrence Buell, to read ecocentrically ("under the sign of nature") means to have accepted *a priori* the value and worth of a referential world beyond the text itself. The stance of the critic mandates attention to extra-textual realities: he or she has assumed a political position that affects reading and interpretation.[1] But attention to this referential world is also invited by the work itself. According to Buell, the salient feature of environmental literature is that nature is not merely a setting or backdrop for human action, but an actual factor in the plot, that is, a character, and sometimes even a protagonist (7-8). This is particularly obvious in nature and wilderness writing, which originate in the

narrator's transformative encounters with a landscape and its inhabitants. Such works often manifest plot structures of romance or conversion, in which the act of writing appears either as a rite of obsessive homage prefiguring an "eternal return," or as a demonstration of faith and loyalty, a gesture of thanks for gifts received from the land. Writing in this mode becomes part of the story, so that the text itself is an action to be evaluated in terms of the originary event and the world from which that event springs; such is the case with spiritual autobiography in the Augustinian or Dantean mode, a genre with which romantic and post-romantic nature writing is closely bound up.[2] By compelling the reader's attention to return to the referential world - bearing, of course, the more enlightened view conveyed by the story itself - such writing also manifests a social agenda. It wants to change the way we relate to nature. Philosopher David Abram in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996), a work that has aroused considerable interest among ecocritics, argues that our environmental problems have arisen because we have lost the habit of relating to other creatures in a manner consistent with how we actually perceive them; we regard beings in nature as inscrutable, mysterious, incomprehensible, or "other", but a close phenomenological analysis shows that we actually encounter them synaesthetically as perceiving, expressive beings who interact with us in an "intersubjective field"(31-72). In short, although the world "speaks," we have grown deaf; we do not think of other beings in nature as ethical equals, possessing valued attributes such as language, feelings, or character; as a result, we recklessly consume and despoil. Abram blames "alphabetic literacy" for this sad state of affairs, arguing that it has displaced our synaesthetic perceptions from nature to texts. He looks to nature writing as a redemptive mode of discourse that can redirect our attention toward an animate, "more-than-human" world.

Given arguments such as these, it is easy to see the prescience in Barry Lopez's famous statement to *Antaeus* in 1986 that nature writing would not only one day "produce a major and lasting body of American literature" but also "provide the foundation for a reorganization of American political thought"(297). It is also understandable that ecocritics

might see themselves and their works as furthering such a process. But where are the methods to match our mountains? How can we read professionally in a manner that brings consideration of the referential world to bear on our interpretations and judgments in more than a casual way? Even Buell finds it hard to pursue the consequences of his vision beyond a text-based analysis. At one point in *The Environmental Imagination* he invokes the damp, gray winter scene outside his Massachusetts window to expose Thoreau's aesthetic and thematic agenda in editing Walden's winter to a uniform "chilly whiteness" (246). This brief, vivid moment endures long enough to suggest tantalizing possibilities, but it is soon eclipsed by the profoundly erudite, sophisticated, and relentlessly textual argument that has made Buell's work indispensible.

Nevertheless, promising approaches toward incorporating the "real world" have emerged on the expanding horizon of ecocrticism. As early as 1984, Michael Cohen drew on his own experience in the Sierra to interpret the writings of John Muir in *The Pathless Way*. John Elder's seminal study of poetry, *Imagining the Earth* (1986, 1996), argued that "natural scenes engender and inform meditations on literature as well as the other way around"(3), and his *Reading the Mountains of Home* (1998) "explore[s], in a direct and personal way, an ecosystem of meaning that includes both literature and the land"(4). In *For Love of the World* (1992), Sherman Paul presented readings of nature writers informed not just by his reading, but also by his Leopoldian practice of inhabitation (which he called "worlding") at Wolf Lake in northern Minnesota. Don Scheese (1996) has argued for the central importance of field work in understanding "the dynamics that develop between author and locale," as well as checking the writer's accuracy and, not incidentally, giving the critic some fresh air (9-10). David Robertson (1997) finds pilgrimage a valuable method, since both the writer and the scholar find the "real matter" of their life and work in both texts and landscapes. Ian Marshall's exciting *Story Line* (1998) presents a "literary geography" of the Appalachian Trail that blends conventional literary interpretation with poststructuralist theory and his own direct experience of the landscape, arguing that

"narrative scholarship is a way of putting into practice the ecological principle of interconnectedness" (3-8).

This sample suggests the rich and varied possibilities for field-based reading that have begun to emerge in ecocritical practice.[14] In a step toward synthesis, and perhaps toward theory as well, I would like to offer natural history as a model for the disciplined integration of field work - that is, experience of the referential world - into interpretation and criticism. Because natural history is both a scientific practice and a literary genre, it can serve as a guide for both reading and writing, that is, for studying the primary material and communicating the results. Of course, it is perilous to trade in scientific analogies; they can be quite seductive for humanists who regard the prestige of science with a mixture of fear and envy. Northrop Frye once famously disparaged the ordinary reader by invoking the image of a scientist at work:

> The critic has a subjective background of experience formed by his temperament and by every contact with words he has made, including newspapers, advertisements, conversations, movies, and whatever he read at the age of nine. He has a specific skill in responding to literature which is no more like this subjective background, with all its private memories, associations, and arbitrary prejudices, than reading a thermometer is like shivering.(*Anatomy of Criticism*, 28)

Though dated, Frye's analogy remains instructive for its blend of optimism and condescension. It posits a clear and absolute line between the critic and the ordinary reader, as if a person were always one thing or the other. It then assumes that literary criticism can be objective and impersonal, and that these supposed virtues can be achieved by cultivating skills that make the critic as precisely responsive as an instrument. It celebrates a kind of numerical precision, to the implicit detriment of narrative and, indeed, of any kind of unquantifiable experience, as if equations were more valuable than stories, or reading a thermometer more interesting than shivering. In so doing, the analogy trades in a naive view

of the humanities that I have heard from more than one scientist, namely, that humanistic inquiry is a touchy-feely matter of impressions and emotions, lacking true intellectual rigor - as if there were no such thing as evidence, logic, or coherent arguments in our work. But Frye's hope is misplaced. Criticism can never be objective in any scientific sense, for reading is an ineluctably subjective endeavor, and an objective report of a subjective event is a contradiction in terms. What distinguishes the literary critic from the casual reader, I believe, is the *disciplined* subjectivity of the latter.

Suppose, then, that we envision a literary critic whose subjectivity is disciplined in ways similar to that of the natural historian. We might take as our model any of the great naturalists, Humboldt or Darwin, say, or to pick from our own century, someone like Rachel Carson or Aldo Leopold. To the observation and interpretation of nature, such a naturalist brings, first, extensive learning in the discourse and material of the natural sciences: a developing body of thought that aspires to a coherent picture of the living world. To this is added a liberal education in culture, ethics, aesthetics, philosophy, literature, and the arts. In sum, the classic naturalist is learned in both technical science and humanistic traditions.

Second, the naturalist brings an array of skills for gathering information: observation, photography, drawing, writing. Some of these translate, when needed, into powers of expression needed to communicate the results of observation and analysis. Both knowledge and skills come into play in the third area, which is the actual field work. Before all, natural history depends upon direct observation: the naturalist works outdoors, *in situ* not *in vitro*, and his or her reports have an eyewitness authority that has been acknowledged as a principal standard of value from the time of Gilbert White on down through Darwin, Burroughs, and the "nature faker" controversies at the turn of the twentieth century. The great entomologist E.O. Wilson memorably depicts the naturalist entering a state of altered consciousness at the threshold of observation:

> I walked into the forest, struck as always by the coolness of the shade beneath tropical vegetation, and continued until I came to a small glade that

> opened onto the sandy path. I narrowed the world down to the span of a few meters. Again I tried to compose the mental set – call it the naturalist's trance, the hunter's trance – by which biologists locate more elusive organisms. I imagined this place and all its treasures were mine alone and might be so forever in memory – if the bulldozer came.
>
> In a twist my mind came free and I was aware of the hard workings of the natural world beyond the periphery of ordinary attention, where passions lose their meaning and history is in another dimension, without people, and great events pass without record or judgment. I was a transient of no consequence in this familiar yet deeply alien world that I had come to love. The uncounted products of evolution were gathered there for purposes having nothing to do with me; their long Cenozoic history was enciphered into a genetic code I could not understand. The effect was strangely calming. Breathing and heartbeat diminished, concentration intensified. It seemed to me that something extraordinary in the forest was very close to where I stood, moving to the surface and discovery. (6-7)

Significantly, the naturalist here enters the forest fully informed and prepared for discovery, but as observation begins he centers and empties his mind, so as to be receptive to the unknown. He must hold his learning and its world of discourse in suspense in order to experience and recognize anything new. Following observation, the naturalist returns to reflect on the experience and synthesize it with other observations, sometimes from remote places, to discover meaningful patterns and connections. Such was the practice of Humboldt and Darwin, setting the standard for the great synthetic works of latter day naturalists such as Wilson and Carson.

The outcome of this process is, of course, a narrative - a *history*, what Darwin called a "journal of researches", though it was much more coherent than a mere diary. John Hildebidle, in his excellent study of Thoreau's debt to the natural history tradition, describes

the genre succinctly as "informal, inclusive, intensely local, experiential, eccentric, nativist, and utilitarian, yet in the end concerned not only with fact but with fundamental spiritual and aesthetic truths" (61). This sort of history reports the witness and interpretation of direct observation along with the results of synthesizing reflection. It is a story of the learning and illumination that comes to a subject prepared by prior study and centered by the naturalist's trance. As a mode of discourse, natural history not only conveys information but also demonstrates a method of inquiry; in other words, it describes both the process and the results of a disciplined subjectivity. In this respect it fully embodies the literary ideal of expressive form.

Adapting the method of natural history to the study of literature requires the cultivation of two critical virtues that I will call erudition and engagement. Erudition means all the discursive knowledge we gain from systematic reading, not just of other literary works, but of all relevant criticism, theory, biography, and scholarship in allied disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, history, science, or religion. It also includes, needless to say, the essential skills of close reading and exegesis - in short, everything now required in graduate school. Erudition fosters attentiveness and heightens perception, not only within the textual world but out in the referential world as well. That latter world is primarily addressed by the second virtue, engagement, which means the deliberate and systematic study of the referential world through direct encounter. In the case of nature writing, engagement requires going out and experiencing the landscape itself.

For the critic as natural historian, erudition is prerequisite to engagement. Erudition creates the informed sensibility that enables productive observation. It fosters attentiveness both to the work and to the referential landscape. Before going into the field, the critic gains discursive knowledge of the landscape through guidebooks, commentary, and, perhaps, other works of natural history besides the primary text (which has of course also been read in depth). Once in the field, however, all this knowledge must be held in suspense: the critic exits discursive thought in order to be "tutored by the land" (in Barry Lopez's

evocative phrase). Only a disciplined subjectivity can subject itself attentively to this sort of experience, a multisensorial, whole-body encounter, inherently synaesthetic and thus charged with the immediacy and vivid mutuality of Abram's intersubjective field, so that the more-than-human world becomes a matter of intense, incontrovertible certainty that qualifies and may even clarify the impressions gained from initial readings of the work in question. The discipline of erudition charges the observer's mind with all the possibilities for meaning in the ordinary sense (as Thomas Kuhn speaks of "ordinary science"). These do not evaporate, but are held in suspense, are present in the background, as it were, to provide a dark field against which the new can appear in full clarity, can be *discovered*. For the new is always both unexpected and yet connected to the known. The observer may not know at first what it is, but must know at once that it is significant. And here is the crucial difference between the critic as naturalist and the tourist or casual reader: both can encounter a text or landscape subjectively, but the critic's discipline is required for discovery.

To illustrate how engagement can transform interpretation, let me briefly describe a field research project that I conducted during the early 1980's on Clarence King's *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* (1872), a classic of scientific adventure and a formative specimen of western Americana. In the late 1860's King, a young geologist fresh out of Yale, joined the California Geological Survey and spent three years exploring and mapping the Sierra Nevada. His accounts of peril and discovery in high places appeared serially in the *Atlantic Monthly*, delighting audiences throughout the genteel East. Perhaps the most memorable of these stories recounts his ascent of Mt. Tyndall, a peak just north of Mt. Whitney that King and his party, camped high in what is now Kings Canyon National Park, mistakenly thought was the highest summit in California. The intervening country was unknown and looked impassable; it sparked King's ambition:

> Brewer and Hoffman were old climbers, and their verdict of impossible oppressed me as I lay awake thinking of it; but early next morning I had made up my mind, and, taking Cotter aside, I asked him in an easy manner

> whether he would like to penetrate the Terra Incognita with me at the risk of our necks, provided Brewer should consent. In a frank, courageous tone he answered after his usual mode, "Why not?" Stout of limb, stronger yet in heart, of iron endurance, and a quiet, unexcited temperament, and, better yet, deeply devoted to me, I felt that Cotter was the one comrade I would choose to face death with, for there was in his manhood no room for fear or shirk.(50-51)

King and Cotter set off alone with improvised packs, and, after five days of hair-raising adventure, managed to scale the peak and return to base camp, only to find that their companions, fearing the worst, had already left for the lowlands.

The passage quoted gives a fair idea of the energy and machismo of King's narrative, which abounds in the topoi of classic adventure embellished with allusions to literature, arts, and other forms of high culture as well as pervasive (but discreet) appeals to the classist prejudices of his readers. All this makes King a great target for political or new historicist critique, which have seen the literature of exploration and discovery as abetting western imperialism and environmental destruction, but my concern at the moment is solely with textual artifice. A few examples will suggest the richness and diversity of King's literary devices. The journey is conceived in epic terms as a descent to the underworld, reinforced by allusions to Dante and the Doré illustrations ("at my feet the basin of the lake, still, black, and gemmed with reflected stars, like the void into which Dante looked through the bottomless gulf of Dis" - 91-92). The landscape is depicted as a theater for heroic action ("West of us stretched the Mount Brewer wall with its succession of smooth precipices and amphitheater ridges. To the north the great gorges of the King's River yawned down five thousand feet" - 64-65). Landforms are described in terms of the romantic sublime with a distinctly Ruskinian flavor ("the Kern divide ... battlemented and adorned with innumerable rough-hewn spires and pinnacles, was a mass of glowing orange intensely defined against the deep violet sky" - 58).[4] Such constructs are reinforced by

King's geological catastrophism, which governs his scientific digressions ("...old glacier valleys, these imperishable tracks of unseen engines ... the ruins of some bygone geological period" - 79). As for the narrator, he appears variously as a promethean warrior attempting a "campaign for the top of California" (51) in the face of a hostile landscape ("if Nature had intended to secure the summit from all assailants, she could not have planned her defences better" -74), as a knight accompanied by a faithful squire ("deeply devoted to me"), or as a young hero "oppressed" by an elder who "felt a certain fatherly responsibility over our youth, a natural desire that we should not deposit our triturated remains in some undiscoverable hole among the feldspathic granites" (51). The plot structure follows that of a medieval quest romance, in which the hero departs from a center of civilization and enters the wilderness where, after adventures of escalating intensity, he survives an ultimate test and returns with the power to bestow boons, in this case scientific knowledge and a powerful story that affirms his culture's ideals.

King's adroit use of such literary devices makes for an exciting read but also creates the suspicion that he may be less interested in accuracy than in dramatic effects. King's biographers, too, mention his professional and social aspirations, his fondness for posh men's clubs, and his reputation as a raconteur. He was clearly writing to an elite eastern audience, of whom few, if any, were likely to visit the places he described. My suspicions were further aroused by impressions gained from informal backpack trips to the southern High Sierra in the late 1970's. I had seen the pass from which Brewer and Hoffman had glimpsed Mt. Tyndall, and it did not look particularly steep, nor did the canyon below, through which I was hiking, seem much of an obstacle. As for Mt. Tyndall, I had seen it from the Kern River uplands along the John Muir Trail, and it looked like nothing more than a big rock pile with a walk-in approach and an easy scramble to the top. All this led me to conclude that King had overdrawn the landscape and exaggerated its dangers for the sake of drama and heroic effects. His Sierra was a caricature, based on a real place, perhaps, but largely constructed out of literary topoi and other cultural apparatus with no intrinsic

relation to the actual landscape. These conclusions were based on conventional textual analysis and reinforced by the handful of extant critical and biographical studies. I taught the book this way for years.

It was not until a colleague from the geology department took issue with this reading that I decided to go back to the High Sierra. She had used King's scientific works in her course on the exploration of the West, and she averred that his account ought to be taken at face value, given the precision and accuracy of his geological reports. Debate resolved nothing. So I enlisted four students from my nature writing course, and we retraced King's ascent of Mt. Tyndall, having prepared assiduously by studying both his text and his route using topographic maps, guidebooks, and published accounts of the area.

Space does not permit a detailed account of our journey, which began in a snowstorm at nine thousand feet and, like King's, included cliffhangers, feats of endurance, and narrow escapes. Here I wish merely to mention a few of the ways in which this exercise of engagement altered and clarified our interpretation of King's account. Because the route lies wholly within the back country of two national parks, it is largely unchanged since King's day; there are only a few miles of trail, and the only other "improvement" is a park service foot bridge. Psychologically, however, things are quite different. The landscape has been surveyed, named, and administered; our maps gave a precise aerial view of the terrain, revealing alternative routes and showing that we could have walked out to civilization in two or three days from any point; we carried nylon tents, sleeping bags, down jackets, and freeze-dried food. In short, the mountains were no longer *terra incognita*, as they had been for King. We felt a good deal safer and more comfortable.

The landscape, however, proved much more rugged and challenging than expected. I first began to suspect that King might not have exaggerated when we reached the top of the Mt. Brewer pass and gazed down a precipice at a snow gully as steep as a ski jump; the view from below, distorted by foreshortening, had made the pass look easy. The Mt. Brewer wall, along which King and Cotter had climbed, was studded with giant, precarious

blocks that eventually forced us to rock climb down six hundred feet into a snowy amphitheater, across which we pushed to rejoin King's route below Longley Pass, now blocked by a thirty-foot cornice of overhanging snow. These were the first of many episodes that made us appreciate the appropriateness of King's descriptions in terms of both detail and atmosphere. The Dantean allusions and gothic imagery no longer seemed like gratuitous set pieces; they seemed invited by the circumstances. We were now able to calibrate King's descriptions more accurately as combinations of physiographic fact and cultural artifact. Similarly, we gained a more balanced view of King's own persona. We had suspected him of bombast and posturing; now phrases such as "at the risk of our necks" carried the scent of truth. Insights like these allowed us to appreciate how the idea of the West, with its attendant myths, aspirations, and master metaphors, could have arisen from a potent reaction between European archetypes and North American landscapes in the alembic of personalities as learned, imaginative, and ambitious as King's. Without this process of engagement and its culminating field work, we would have remained content to interpret King's account as a mere construct, a deftly woven fabric of topos and allusion rather than a creative struggle between a powerful mind and an equally powerful place. In sum, engagement adds balance to interpretation by addressing landscape as well as culture, recognizing that texts like *Mountaineering* always grow from a combination of both.

The preceding discussion is not meant, of course, as an actual demonstration of the method, but only a sketch of its possibilities for enriching a criticism historically based on erudition alone.[5] A full-scale natural history of reading would combine erudition and engagement in a balanced manner and eventuate, like classic natural history itself, in a narrative of illumination and discovery. Narrative is the appropriate vehicle for dealing with complex realities, such as landscapes, ecosystems, and literary works (which ecocritics like Joseph Meeker and William Rueckert have sought to construe ecologically). But it is also the best mode of discourse for conveying the results of observation, that is, of disciplined subjectivity. Though concerned with fact and accuracy, natural history does not pretend to a

wholly objective truth. The critic as natural historian is always present, not only in the primary encounter with landscape, but also in the subsequent processes of reflection, interpretive synthesis, and eventual narration. The critical essay in this mode brings the two types of learning experience - text and landscape - together in a single narrative, thus providing a stereoscopic view of the work in question.

The critical essay is also, perforce, an exemplary narrative: it not only conveys information but demonstrates a way of reading. It therefore serves the work and its readers, as all worthy criticism should. By witnessing to engagement with the landscape, it also parallels the narrative of natural history which is both its subject and its inspiration. For nature writing always exemplifies and envisions new possibilities for human relations with the rest of the living world, and hence serves a prophetic political purpose. The critical essay participates in this politics of redemption by exemplifying relations to both art and landscape, thus bringing nature and culture together. It therefore has the potential to help counteract the alienating effects of Abram's alphabetic literacy and the notion, inherited from Descartes and his age, of culture as somehow apart from or opposed to nature.

These are large claims, to be sure. Objections to a natural history of reading might be raised on various grounds: that such criticism is mere self-indulgence; that the critic, by engaging in narrative, presumes to supersede the artist and blur the line between literature and criticism; that by endeavoring to speak for nature the critic is merely perpetuating the scandal of human domination; that engagement is just an excuse to avoid real, serious work in the library; and so forth. Of course, any method can be abused, and someone will always make a career out of doing so. There have always been bad critics, just as there have always been nature fakers and sentimental outdoor writers. But all these are judged, sooner or later, by their fruits. To what degree does an essay serve the work rather than the ego or personal needs of the critic? Does the critic adopt a confessing posture, in the Augustinian manner, toward both the work and the world to which it refers? For there is no place and no work, however humble it may appear, about which we cannot learn more.

As for the line between literature and criticism, it has never been very clearly drawn, and why should it be? Lately it has begun to appear as artificial as the line between fiction and nonfiction. One should get pleasure from any text worth reading. Moreover, other recent schools of criticism also use narrative and foreground the experience of the critic. Feminist criticism, to take an obvious example, maintains that personal witness in a climate of oppression constitutes primary evidence.[6] Another trend, "narrative criticism", foregrounds the experiences of the critic as literary pilgrim.[7] Here the danger is an understandable temptation to lapse into journalism or travelogue, to the neglect of erudition or systematic engagement and consequent diversion of attention from the work to the critic. Similar issues arise with what has been called "autobiographical criticism,"[8] which narrates the critic's own personal relation to the work: one can easily fall prey to the vice that C.S. Lewis, speaking of Milton's Satan, called "incessant autobiography." The critic's private issues take center stage, because his or her subjectivity has not been disciplined, has not actually been *subjected* to the work. But a true natural history of reading calls for subjectivity that is doubly disciplined: to land and library, nature and culture both. And because it eventuates in a narrative of learning, the method describes a path that others can follow, thus opening itself to verification and testing.

A natural history of reading offers exciting prospects for scholars and teachers in an era of postmodern ferment. It promises to revitalize critical practice by adding a research dimension that both draws on and transcends the virtues of existing method even as it returns, paradoxically, to the root meaning of method itself: a systematic journey or pathway toward a goal. In this respect the naturalist, the explorer, and the literary scholar have always been kindred spirits, aspiring to lofty and synthesizing views even as they delight in local, particular knowledge and the personal encounter with place. In elevating our vision, therefore, to encompass mountains as well as texts, we honor not only the natural world that sustains and inspires us, but organic tradition as well.

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The Union Institute, July 1999

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NOTES

1. This is hardly an unprecedented situation, of course. Consider the leftist agendas of Marxism (e.g., Terry Lovell, *Pictures of Reality*) or even deconstruction (e.g., Paul De Man, *The Resistance to Theory*). On politics in interpretation generally see Stanley Cavell, "The Politics of Interpretation."

2. For discussions of conversion paradigms in nature writing, see Schauffler, *Turning to Earth* and Tallmadge, "John Muir and the Poetics of Natural Conversion."

3. Other works that incorporate narrative or field research into ecocritical practice include William Howarth, *Thoreau in the Mountains* (1982), Sean O'Grady, *Pilgrims to the Wild* (1993), Scott Slovic, *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing* (1992), John Tallmadge, *Meeting the Tree of Life* (1997).

4. For an excellent discussion of King's responses in light of prevailing scientific and aesthetic norms, see Roger Stein, *John Ruskin and Aesthetic Thought in America,* pp. 169-183.

5. Two recent studies of *Mountaineering* also exemplify the fruits of engaged reading and field work. See John P. O'Grady, *Pilgrims to the Wild* (1993), and David Robertson, *Real Matter* (1997), pp. 26-34.

6. Not surprisingly, a strong ecofeminist current within ecocriticism treats beings in nature as an oppressed class within the universe of patriarchal hegemony; see Gaard and Murphy.

7. Narrative criticism was the subject of a seminal roundtable at the 1995 conference of the Western Literature Association. Participants included Suellen Campbell, Michael P. Cohen, Gretchen Legler, Glen Love, Ian Marshall, Ann Ronald, Stephanie Sarver, Don Scheese, and Scott Slovic. Marshall's *Story Line:*(1998) is a brilliant example of this approach.

8. For a definition and instructive example, see Diane P. Freedman's article, "A Whale of a Different Color" in *ISLE* 4:2.

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