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**ATTITUDES OF REGARD: DIGNITY, MYSTERY, AND DESIRE
IN BARRY LOPEZ, EDWARD ABBEY, AND ANNIE DILLARD**

BY
 **KEVIN D. MALLORY**

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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ABSTRACT

In Arctic Dreams (1986), Barry Lopez explores the natural history as well as the human history of the Arctic. Using a Lacanian framework, my dissertation theorizes Lopez's "attitude of regard" and suggests that his imperative is to follow one's desire to discover new places, new scientific data, or new theories with vigilant awareness of the desire for finite understanding. The land is "mysterious," he argues, and if we approach it with an "uncalculating mind," we will recognize in our designs "stains" that render the familiar unfamiliar: animals behaving uncharacteristically, plants growing outside their microhabitats, people with inscrutable worldviews. Our ethical obligation is to give rein to our desire but also to regard the object of that desire, the land, with alertness, to see it as uncanny. The very source of the land's dignity is its "fundamental strangeness" which can never be exhausted by our desire.

Within the framework of desire and dignity, therefore, my dissertation moves to a detailed analysis of Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire (1968) and Annie Dillard's Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (1975), showing how each author comes to an ethic similar to Lopez's: Abbey through audacious adventure and anarchist polemics; Dillard through a lyrical and rapturous exploration of a world of fecundity, death, and mystery. Abbey calls for us to live within paradox, trying to comprehend a strange, beautiful, and dangerous earth despite the impossibility of ever knowing it. Dillard's narrator is traumatized by the realization that there are aspects of the world she inhabits that are beyond the understanding of science and language. She faces the world with openness, waiting for what could be rapture or terror.

My dissertation concludes with a study of the interconnections of the ethic of this

literature with the theoretical use of the term love by writers such as Frye, Kristeva, and Adorno. I then trace the affinity of this ethic with several contemporary movements in environmental thought: postmodern science, environmental pragmatism, and ecofeminism. The final section is an exploration of the potential contribution of contemporary nature writing to radical democracy as described by Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe, Rorty, and Connolley.

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PREFACE

I can trace this thesis back to two pivotal events in my literary studies. The first occurred during an undergraduate course taught by Dr. Ian Cameron at Carleton University. I was studying rhetoric, ideology, and propaganda while, by pure chance, reading Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire. Those familiar with Abbey's book will laugh at this fortuitous coincidence. I wrote a paper for Dr. Cameron on Abbey's use of the Elijah story, a paper I rewrote several years later and presented as "Anarchy and the Prophetic Voice in Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire" at the first conference of the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE). The topic of literature and the environment excited me and became the basis for my doctoral research proposal and, finally, the focus of my dissertation. Along this path, I have come to read many works of the most prominent nature writers as well as writings of scholars with whom I share similar literary interests and environmental concerns.

The second event was another fortuitous textual meeting. I began reading Theodor Adorno's Negative Dialectics for a graduate course taught by Dr. David Jarraway here at the University of Ottawa. Finding Adorno somewhat taxing, I occasionally interrupted my reading of Negative Dialectics with Barry Lopez's Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape. The texts seemed to mimic one another. Dr. Jarraway allowed me to write a short paper on the intersections of the two texts as one of the course's required exercises. I argued that Adorno's attempt to rescue philosophy through the dialectics of critical theory parallels Lopez's call for "critical intelligence" to counter the prevailing ideologies that guide our actions in the Arctic. I was unaware at the time of Romand Coles's writing on the connections between Adorno and Lopez, but was encouraged by his essay, "Ecotones and Environmental Ethics: Adorno and

Lopez," which I found a few weeks after writing my assignment.

The last text we studied in Dr. Jarraway's course, Slavoj Žižek's The Sublime Object of Ideology, had even stronger philosophical similarities with Arctic Dreams, similarities which form the theoretical backbone of my dissertation. By the end of the course, not only had I added Lopez to the list of writers I hoped to study for my dissertation, but I also had a theoretical approach to my topic, and I had a thesis supervisor: Dr. Jarraway.

I began the research for my dissertation by linking Lacanian psychoanalytic terms from Žižek's writings with events and reflections in Lopez's Arctic Dreams. Eventually, I settled on three terms which seemed central to Lopez's writing: the *uncanny*, *desire*, and the *Real*. Applying these terms yielded rich interpretations of pivotal moments within Arctic Dreams, most often encounters with Arctic animals, landscapes, and native inhabitants. And because so much of both Abbey's Desert Solitaire and Annie Dillard's Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is concerned with the same issues as Arctic Dreams--perception, reality, representation, etc.--it was no surprise that exploring these texts with the same psychoanalytic concepts in mind yielded similar results.

The final sections of another of Žižek's texts, Looking Awry, move from his exploration of Lacanian theory and popular culture to a consideration of dignity and of democracy. It was my wish to make a similar move in my dissertation, especially because Lopez writes increasingly about dignity towards the end of Arctic Dreams. It seemed like a logical step then to push my analysis to a consideration of dignity and of ethics in Arctic Dreams, Desert Solitaire, and Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. This is indeed the direction my dissertation follows, ending with a consideration of the affinity of the ethical attitudes found in the works of these nature writers with those found in contemporary environmental thought and in radical democracy.

My own thinking, of course, growing out of my studies has not been confined to nature writing and philosophy. The ideas I have been poring over for so long have had a great influence on my understanding in surprisingly diverse areas of my life. My relationships with my wife and family are shot through with considerations of respect, dignity, and the fundamental "otherness" of even those closest to me. I am sensitive to the way I react to the anxiety provoked by that "otherness." The ethics found in the writings I have studied influences my understanding, or lack thereof, of my pets' behaviour, of my yard and garden, of traumatic encounters with dandelions and ice storms. I have thought long and hard about the feral creatures living within the bounds of "my" property. I have studied the mysteries of compost. I have reassessed my relations with neighbours, friends, colleagues, and strangers in light of my understanding of desire, knowledge, and subjectivity. I am disturbed and charmed by television shows, sporting events, parks, and shopping malls in ways I had never before considered.

It is no surprise that my understanding of politics has been informed by my studies. From local issues to foreign affairs, I have found a new perspective from which to look not only at environmental issues, but also at problems arising out of situations where individuals or groups are forced to face an Other defying all attempts to be contained, constrained, or assimilated. The work I have done informs my opinion on municipal planning, on the "Common Sense Revolution" of the current Ontario government and its implicit assumption of complete understanding. It influences my attitude towards native/non-native conflict, Québécois identity, and the recent rise of regional politics and parties.

The ethic in the works I have studied is simple to describe but agonizingly difficult to live: To respect "Others"--everything from backyard landscapes to historical ethnic enemies--that

is to say, to recognize their dignity, is not a matter of identifying with them or trying to find something shared. It is in adopting an attitude which recognizes *and* cultivates the mysterious, unknowable "thing" in them which provokes anxiety. Adopting such an ethic, what Lopez calls an "attitude of regard," is an act of courage and of love.

Now that this project is complete, I wish to extend my love and thanks to Valérie for offering unwavering support, for critiquing and editing, and for listening. So much listening. I also wish to thank my colleague Esther Wolgemut for her ready willingness to read, discuss, and sort out my many crises, and for her wonderful friendship. Thanks also to my brother Mark Mallory for his invaluable input and for reading and discussing my theoretical flights, all on government time. Thanks, of course, to Dr. David Jarraway for not only reading and commenting upon my work with great care and consideration, but for offering encouragement and praise the likes of which I have never encountered in my studies to date.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Barry Lopez encourages a "wariness of borders," but, to introduce my thesis properly, it is helpful to situate it in the growing field of "ecocriticism." I will begin this chapter with a brief description of this field of study and of the issue in ecocriticism most closely related to my thesis: the place of contemporary literary theory in the analysis of nature writing and of the relationship between humans and the non-human world. From here I will describe the work of Laurence Buell and Scott Slovic as a means of situating my own work with ecocritical writings which have preceded it. The chapter will conclude with a summary of my thesis and the subsequent chapters of this dissertation.

"Ecocriticism"

The term "ecocriticism" was probably first used in William Rueckert's 1978 essay, "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." Rueckert's experiment was "with the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature" (107). The term is currently used in a much broader sense to describe the study of the relationship between texts and the environment, specifically the "natural" environment. Cheryl Glotfelty, in the Introduction to The Ecocriticism Reader, writes:

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

the human and the nonhuman. (xix)

My thesis does indeed share this premise and explores the relationship between specific literary texts and our understanding of the physical world. Like William Rueckert, I argue for the application of "ecological concepts" to the study of these texts, and, conversely, I explore the "ecological concepts" for which these texts argue.

The idea of studying texts from an ecological point of view is not really new, and "ecocriticism" has a history going back much further than the use of the term. What has happened in the last decade or so is that literary critics with similar concerns and perspectives have finally found each other and have started to share their ideas in forums that bring ecocritics together, and through associations such as the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment (ASLE), ecocriticism's flagship organization, formed in 1992. Glotfelty suggests that the discipline of English has addressed the crises of civil rights and women's liberation through university hiring practices, literary theory, and canon formation, but that the third major crisis of the last thirty years, environmental degradation, has yet to be addressed in a significant manner (Love 226). She hopes that ecocriticism will become a strong voice in the academic profession and that in the future "[s]tudents taking literature and composition courses will be encouraged to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications" (Glotfelty xxv). Indeed, positions have since been created in English departments under the title of "Literature and Environment," ASLE has joined the Modern Language Association, and "ecocriticism" has been featured in The Times Higher Education Supplement (Winkler A8). Despite the swelling of ASLE's ranks and the rapid

increase of critical writing in the field, most scholars see ecocriticism as vibrant and evolving and are determined to keep it "suggestive and open" (Glotfelty xxii), interdisciplinary, and free from theoretical dogmatism, or even agreement.

Ecocriticism is currently confined almost exclusively to American Literature in both its critical works and the texts it studies. This focus is certainly changing, but the works that serve as the "landmarks in literary ecology" most often consider American literary works and their effects on or reflections of American culture. Some of the "canonical" texts in ecocriticism are Leo Marx's The Machine in the Garden (1964), Joseph Meeker's The Comedy of Survival (1972), Annette Kolodny's The Lay of the Land (1975), Roderick Frazier Nash's Wilderness and the American Mind (1982), Max Oelschlaeger's The Idea of Wilderness (1991), Scott Slovic's Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing (1992), and Laurence Buell's The Environmental Imagination (1995). In 1996, Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm edited The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology which contains some of the most seminal essays in the field of ecocriticism, including writings from several of the writers just listed.

Glotfelty suggests Elaine Showalter's model of the three development stages of feminist criticism (feminine-feminist-female) as a useful scheme for describing three "analogous phases in ecocriticism": the study of how nature rather than women is represented in literature; rather than the recuperation of "women's writing," the recuperation of the "neglected genre of nature writing" and of fiction and poetry writers whose writing "manifests ecological awareness"; and, rather than a feminist examination of constructions such as "femininity," the theoretical examination of such constructions as "species," "human," and "nature," as well as dualisms such as mind/body and culture/nature (xxiii-xxiv). The scheme works to a degree by showing that "analogous

phases" are all underway in ecocriticism, but it distorts somewhat the way in which many ecocritical texts combine all three "phases," and it suggests that there is a development that has left ecocriticism at the third phase, where in fact all three modes of criticism are ongoing. Nonetheless, this scheme gives an indication of the great variety of approaches taken by ecocritics both to nature writing and to American Literature in general.

The Post-Structuralism Debate

My dissertation is a study of texts by Barry Lopez, Edward Abbey, and Annie Dillard, three writers who are unquestionably central to the American Nature Writing tradition (whether the authors feel this is true or not). With respect to Glotfelty's phases of ecocriticism, I feel that I engage all three, but especially "theoretical examination." I employ mostly Lacanian post-structural criticism, a move that places this work squarely on one side of an often vituperative debate among ecocritics. At the ASLE website, there are over a dozen short essays responding to the question "What is Ecocriticism?" Most provide a definition similar to Glotfelty's. One point that surfaces in some of the essays, however, is that post-structuralist theory is somehow at odds with an ecocritical approach. Though sympathetic to post-structuralism, Ian Marshall notes that "it seems to ignore the real world in order to engage in mental and linguistic gymnastics"(Marshall 1). Harry Crockett writes, "[ecocritics] reject the prevailing critical assumption that reality is socially constructed" (Crockett 1). These comments are not restricted to the website but come up repeatedly in panel discussions at conferences on literature and the environment, on internet discussion lists, and in ecocritical works. Glotfelty notes that "some ecocritics condemn poststructuralism for its seeming denial of a physical ground to meaning" (xxviii). The publication of Uncommon Ground: Reinventing Nature is a good example of the

terms of this debate.

Uncommon Ground, originally subtitled "Reinventing Nature" after the University of California project of the same name, is a collection of essays "intended to encourage greater reflection about the complicated and contradictory ways in which modern human beings conceive of their place in nature" (Cronon, Foreword, 20). In his essay "The Trouble with Wilderness or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," William Cronon describes wilderness as "quite profoundly a human creation," and suggests that "wilderness poses a serious threat to responsible environmentalism at the end of the twentieth century" (69, 81). Dave Foreman, founder of the environmental activist group Earth First!, accuses Cronon of tossing a "dirt clod at the Wilderness Act and at defenders of Wilderness Areas" and of being a "wilderness foe" (Foreman i). Those people who fall into "Cronon's crowd" "seem perfectly capable of living without wild things. A few of these revisionist scholars even show hostility towards Nature" (4). In the end, Foreman's argument seems to centre on the notion that scholars in "windowless, climate controlled conference rooms of [the] Uncommon Ground ivory tower" are too far removed from the "real world of Grizzly Bears and Gila Chubs . . . from the frightening reality of chainsaws ripping through thousand-year-old forests, from the D-9 blade stopped by brave souls buried to their necks in a rough roadway" (4). Noted environmental philosopher George Sessions attacks Cronon from a similar perspective. In an essay criticizing Cronon's writing, which he describes as "deconstruction," he writes, "in its more extreme version, postmodern deconstruction is a 1960s spinoff from Marxism; a contemporary form of anthropocentric humanism which espouses cultural relativism, an antipathy to science, and a preference for cities" (Sessions 46). I hope it is their passionate defence of the natural environment that led

both Foreman and Sessions to such extreme and seemingly willful misreadings of Cronon's work and that of others in his "crowd."

When reading Cronon or the other writers in Uncommon Ground, I find it difficult to understand what could have created such a commotion. In his foreword to the paperback edition,¹ Cronon notes that the writers were "dismayed but not entirely surprised by how controversial the book proved to be for some of its readers" (19). He states that the essays all have "one key insight":

It is simply that "nature" is a human idea, with a long and complicated cultural history which has led different human beings to conceive of the natural world in very different ways. Far from inhabiting a realm that stands completely apart from humanity, the objects and creatures we label as "natural" are in fact deeply entangled with the words and images and ideas we use to describe them. (20)

Cronon suggests three possible reasons why some readers found this idea threatening: if nature is no longer perceived as an "uncontested and transcendent category," it loses its moral authority as the way things are "supposed" to be; many feel that they must choose either the idea that the world is made of pure matter unaffected by our ideas of it or that it is a pure fantasy in our heads; and criticism of any aspect of environmentalism, including some of its fundamental tenets, is perceived as "anti-environmental" (20-2). Cronon responds by stating that we should indeed question the "moral authority" and "moral certainty" behind differing groups' use of the term "natural," that we must explore the "rich and contradictory" relationship between our ideal nature

¹ It is interesting to note that the subtitle was changed for the paperback version of Uncommon Ground from "Reinventing Nature" to the perhaps less controversial "Rethinking the Human Place in Nature."

and the material nature that we inhabit, and finally that the environmental groups should question their own "most basic assumptions" through self-criticism (20-1). "To protect the nature that is all around us," Cronon writes, "we must think long and hard about the nature we carry inside our heads" (22). To me, such assertions hardly seem radical, let alone controversial or threatening.

The idea that there is a "rich and contradictory" relationship between the material world and our conceptualizations of it is central to my dissertation. We must endlessly question our assumptions about the world even as, paradoxically, assumptions are necessary to keeping our reality intact. Jacques Lacan makes the distinction between our assumptions and the world to which our access is barred, between "reality" and the Real. The Real is precisely everything that is excluded from reality. It is the unsymbolizable. Lacan theorizes that in early childhood we pass from a non-linguistic bond with the maternal to an imaginary understanding of ourselves as unified and whole. With the acquisition of language, however, and the paternal injunction barring access to the maternal, we are forced to confront and adopt the Symbolic Order and its necessary social constructions. Our identities are then constantly negotiated between imaginary and symbolic identifications. So too are our desires. Since we can never obtain the first object of our desire--the (m)Other--nor can we adequately symbolize this incestuous desire, it is fundamentally repressed, and our desires are oriented toward an endless chain of symbolic substitutes for that which we have lost and lack. Our reality is the framework we negotiate between ourselves and the Other, between the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Reality is an attempt to regulate the unbearable overstimulation of the Real. It stages our desires. We have no direct, unmediated access to the Real, only our reality which moves to symbolize traumatic eruptions of the Real within our fantasies and to re-orient our desires when, in a state of anxiety, we broach

the conscious realization of their impossibility. The "nature we carry in our heads" is our reality; it is our attempt to understand and regulate a world beyond us and constituting us. It is the only nature we can know.

Others have certainly made the connections between such post-structural theorizing and the question of a "nature" beyond the human. SueEllen Campbell, in her essay, "The Land and Language of Desire: Where Deep Ecology and Post-Structuralism Meet" (1989), argues that "ecologically minded" nature writers and post-structural theorists do have common ground, that they possess "a shared critical stance" and "shared beliefs about the nature of reality" (127). In short, Campbell sees the writers, whom she calls "ecologists" for short, and the theorists sharing a critical stance opposing, questioning, and rejecting traditional authority by valorizing the marginalised and by subverting the "concepts on which the old hierarchies are built" (128). As an example, Campbell compares Michel Foucault's transformation of madness from an "unproblematic concept into something that is both thoroughly historical and thoroughly political" with Barry Lopez's more "indirect" replacement of the distinction between "humanized landscapes and uninhabited wilderness" with a consideration of the ways in which human imagination has "always interacted with the land" (128). She writes, "Old beliefs, old relations of power, old oppositions--ecology, like theory, would restructure them all" (128).

The ecologists' and theorists' questioning of authority and hierarchies also subverts the idea of objectivity: "Theory and ecology agree: our perceptions are always subjective and we are always involved" (129). Campbell suggests that we need only look to relativity theory and quantum mechanics for a foundation to this belief. In an analogous manner, literary theory shows how our readings are "situated" within "a system of social, political, economic, cultural,

and personal circumstances" and that in reading we *create* meaning (129). Though Campbell suggests that there are shared beliefs between ecologists and theorists, she argues that there are important differences as well and that their common critical stance "need not imply common ideas" (128). She turns to what she perceives as a "complication" in the comparisons between theory and ecology: "For theory, to read--to describe, to interpret--is to act. All the meaning that matters, we create. . . . But for ecology, simply to observe is not always to act" (130). Campbell sees this difference as the "classic opposition between idealism and realism." The idealist post-structuralist thinks the world into being and the realist ecologist insists on what Edward Abbey calls an "*out there*," a world we do not create but which exists independent of our thoughts (Campbell 130). This leads to a "difference in attitude" between theory and ecology. According to Campbell, theory sees the creation of texts as liberating, whereas ecology sees such a fracturing of authority as a "call to caution" for any "human interference" in the natural environment (131). "A 'misread' text and a depleted aquifer," she writes, "present quite different practical problems and raise quite different moral and ethical questions" (131).

Campbell's essay, despite its endorsement of literary theory, sounds similar to the arguments by those who objected to Cronon's Uncommon Ground. She argues that "[t]heory sees everything as textuality. . . . But ecology insists that we pay attention not to the way things have meaning for us, but to the way the rest of the world--the nonhuman part--exists apart from us and our languages" (133). It is here that Campbell is not fair to either literary theory or ecology. Literary theory does suggest that everything is a text and that, as Derrida notes, there is nothing "outside" of the text (Derrida 158). But this view does not suggest that nothing *exists materially* beyond the text. Rather it asserts that there is no *getting* outside the text to an

objective point of reference, no unmediated access to a "Truth." The world "*out there*" is accessible to us only as a text. This does not mean that the material world has no effect upon us or us upon it. And to suggest that post-structuralism in general is not concerned with moral or ethical questions misses somewhat the very impetus of such criticism. As for ecology's concern with "the nonhuman part" of the world, my dissertation argues that "ecologically-minded" writers are very much aware of the inaccessibility of that world and of our endless textual creation and re-creation of it. These "ecologically-minded" writers are often cautionary as Campbell suggests, aware that "misreading" can be catastrophic to the environment, but they also describe the impossibility of using the natural world as a ground to meaning. As Abbey notes in the same text from which Campbell quotes, the sea, the mountains, and the desert are "beyond the ability of man to wholly grasp" and that "there is no way out of these difficulties" (240). In my dissertation I push contemporary literary theory and "ecological-mindedness" further than Campbell, and show that they have much more in common than she allows, that both question any and all attempts at textual closure, whether of an essay, a landscape, or a "depleted aquifer."

It is along these same lines that I disagree with Campbell's reading of Barry Lopez's Arctic Dreams. Campbell tells us how she came to some of her conclusions about theory and ecology through reading Arctic Dreams. As I explained above, she uses Lopez's writing as an example of ecologists' "questioning" the usual oppositions of humanized landscapes and uninhabited wilderness, as well as notions of civilized and primitive. Campbell suggests that, like Lacanian theorists, ecologists such as Lopez "also see an experience of lost unity and a desire to regain it as central to human nature" (134). To this she adds that ecologists are more likely to see this lost unity as coming from "separation from the rest of the natural world," as with

Wordsworth's view that we lose "perfect harmony with nature" as we grow out of childhood (134-5). She argues that Lopez describes a "more purely 'ecological' version" of Wordsworth's view. Paraphrasing Arctic Dreams, Campbell writes,

Because our culture does not teach us that we are plain citizens of the earth,
because we live apart from the natural world and deny our intimacy with it, we
have lost the sense of unity that is still possible in other cultures. Our desire
marks what we have lost and what we still hope to regain. (135)

Campbell's reading of Lopez suffers from the same shortcomings as her reading of post-structural theory vis à vis ecology. That is, Lopez is much more of a "theorist" than Campbell allows. It would seem that, to her, Lopez believes we can regain a "sense of unity" with the natural world, a "sense" which is held by other cultures, by recognizing our "intimacy" with the earth. On the one hand, Campbell seems to argue for grounding meaning in the natural world through a return to an originary unity. On the other hand, that Campbell describes a "*sense*" of unity rather than an unqualified "*unity*" possessed by other cultures seems to indicate that she believes unity itself to be impossible, that all cultures construct their own *sense* of the world.

This latter idea is in line with my own reading of Lopez. For Lopez, desire can never be suspended and language does separate us from the world "out there." It is our obligation, however, to recognize the constructedness of our world and to be sensitive to the gap between language and the world which escapes our language, to the impossibility of exhausting the nonhuman or the human world with our texts. His exploration of "other cultures," specifically the relationship between native people of the Arctic and the landscape, suggests that any sense of "unity" they maintain is a result of intimate knowledge of the particulars of their environment and

a healthy fear and awe for their inability to know the land completely. There is no possibility of "regaining" what is lost; there is no possibility of closure. There are only our fantasies and the fundamentally mysterious.

In one of the most significant books to be published in the field of ecocriticism, The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture (1995), Laurence Buell writes: "to posit a disjunction between text and world is both an indispensable starting point for mature literary understanding and a move that tends to efface the world" (5). The aims of Buell's text are as grand as their scope, but my reason for discussing it are much more particular. Buell analyses the same texts by Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard as my dissertation, but more significantly he adopts a similar strategy as Foreman and, to a lesser degree, Campbell in his approach to the question of representing the natural world. I will focus mostly on Chapter Three of The Environmental Imagination, "Representing the Environment," in an attempt to show the fundamental differences in Buell's and my own approaches to "representation" and the "object world," to literary theory, and to Lopez's writings in particular.

Buell's text is significant in size and scope. Tongue-in-cheek, Harold Fromm suggests that it will "provide a generation of graduate students in American Studies . . . with plenty of material for dissertations, scholarly articles, and sessions for MLA conventions" (Fromm 691). In his introduction Buell writes:

This book has refused to remain the modest undertaking I intended it to be.

Planned as a history of Thoreauvian writing about the American natural environment, it has led me to a broad study of environmental perception, the place of nature in the history of western thought, and the consequences for literary

scholarship and indeed for humanistic thought in general of attempting to imagine a more "ecocentric" way of being. (1)

Focusing on Thoreau as the centre of the American nature writing canon, Buell argues that writing about nature is central to America. He suggests that the American natural environment was first "constructed in the image of old world desire, then reconstructed in the image of American cultural nationalism, then reconstructed again in a latter-day scholarly discourse of American exceptionalism" (5-6). But it is in "the most searching works of environmental reflection" that we might find both "the pathologies that bedevil society at large and some of the alternative paths that it might consider" (2).

In the chapter entitled "Representing the Environment," Buell writes much that I agree with on the issue of representation and the "object-world." He suggests that "our reconstructions of the environment cannot be other than skewed and partial," a point that is "obvious" to "most lay readers" (84). He goes on to argue that "one of the projects of the environmental text is to render the object-world" with a degree of "facticity":

By demanding that imaginary gardens have real toads in them, [environmental nonfiction] makes discourse accountable to the object-world and thereby destabilizes the generic hierarchy of fictive over nonfictive, rendering the boundary porous to the point that artifacts appear arranged along a continuum of facticity, the fictive judged in the first instance according to its fidelity to the factual rather than vice versa. (91-2)

Buell makes this argument with the recognition that this particular literary "conceptual universe" values "the art of discovery" over the "art of fabulation" (92). He suggests that this kind of

realism enables "one to reimagine textual representations as having a dual accountability to matter and discursive mentation" (92). To explain this "dual accountability," he uses a passage from Lopez's Arctic Dreams where Lopez suggests reasons why a seal does not notice an advancing polar bear. Buell notes that Lopez's narratives, generated to explain empirical fact, must satisfy the "mind *and* the ethological facts": that is, science and the "object-world." An environmental text must be faithful to our understanding of the world, which Lopez calls the "interior landscape," and to the world beyond that understanding, "the exterior landscape." Buell celebrates Lopez's accountability "to facticity." He feels that Lopez's assertion that nothing can replace the "complex texture" of what takes place in that exterior landscape "is as much a moral as a factual statement": "The narrative makes no pretense of total accuracy; it is a *theory* of natural history; but nature is the court of appeal" (94).

Buell goes on to argue that environmental facticity makes "a difference in the way one reads" (109), affecting our interpretations of a text based on the relation of the words to what Buell calls the "concrete." Such interpretations in turn affect our actions: "blindness to environment produces unintended destabilizing consequences like skin lesions" (110). Buell criticizes Pierre Bourdieu who suggests that the world is really only a "dialectical relationship between the body and a space structured according to . . . mythico-ritual opposition"(qtd. in Buell 111). To writers like Bourdieu, Buell responds by suggesting that the "contrary evidence is as simple as breathing subzero air" (111). Again he points to Lopez whose focus on the "reality of what's 'out there' . . . reflects [Lopez's] awareness that in the cultures of the Arctic . . . failures of accuracy may be life threatening" (107-8). In short, Buell sees it as imperative to our survival that we recognize the "object-world" beyond our imagination which can and does refute our

conceptualization and our representations of it. I could not agree more.

Where I part ways with Buell is in his characterization of literary theory and its place in the issue of representation and "facticity." Buell suggests that in the "average critical discussion" of works by writers such as Cooper, Whitman, and Faulkner "the literary naturescape exists for its formal or symbolic or ideological properties rather than as a place of literal reference or as an object of retrieval of contemplation for its own sake" (85). For too many critics, Buell argues, it is "unthinkable" that Frost might have observed spiders before writing his poem "Design." Then, in a sudden conclusion, Buell notes: "And so professors of literature, whatever their behavior in ordinary life, easily become antienvironmentalists in their professional practice" (85). Buell sees this dangerous practice as a direct result of positing "a disjunction between text and world . . . a move that tends to efface the world" (5). These kinds of "problems" are "aggravated by the cloistered, urbanized quality of the environment in which this criticism tends to be practised" (5). Buell here echoes Foreman's visions of scholars in "windowless, climate controlled conference rooms" far removed from the "real world of Grizzly Bears and Gila Chubs" (Foreman 4) and Sessions's idea that critics espouse "cultural relativism, an antipathy to science, and a preference for cities" (Sessions 46). What is more disturbing than what Fromm calls Buell's "recurring uneasiness . . . about literary theory's disjunction between text and world" (Fromm 696) is Buell's subtle linking of post-structural theory with antienvironmentalism and the consequences (e.g. skin lesions) of "life threatening" failures of accuracy. He notes:

Whatever the conscious politics of the reader who espouses a philosophical antireferentialism in the domain of literary theory, that stance underrepresents the claims of the environment on humanity by banishing it from the realms of

discourse except as something absent. It forbids discourse the project of evoking the natural world through verbal surrogates. . . . From this standpoint, not mimesis but antireferentialism looks like the police. . . . This is a sobering thought, that the attenuation of mimesis might threaten nature itself. (102)

Citing almost no post-structural theorists, Buell's case against literary theory seems a straw-man argument which, though it suggests his grave concern for environmental issues, underscores his own theoretical shortcomings on the issue of representation.

As with those critical theorists in their urban cloisters, one of the problems with writing and reading, Buell notes, is that they "are acts usually performed indoors, unachievable without long shifts of attention away from the natural environment" (84). Buell argues that the text cannot reproduce the world, but that some texts, when measured against direct experience of that world, seem to be more accurate. How exactly nature is a "court of appeal" for judging facticity is never clear, especially when Buell concedes that it is always mediated. How does he get "outside" despite Derrida's claims? Again the answer is unclear. Buell, however, proceeds from here to describe how literary theory's disjunction of text and world "forbids enabling the reader to see as a seal might see" (102). How exactly the disjunction of text and world, a fact Buell seems to agree with elsewhere in the same chapter, "forbids enabling" one to see as the Other might is not fully explained. He suggests that contemporary literary theory has led us to believe that literature does not "have the power to [respond to the natural world], that such power it might have is overridden by the power of imagination, textuality, and culture over the malleable plastic world that it bends to its will" (86). While I agree with Buell's argument that the "facticity" of realist writing is often overlooked, in statements like the previous he seems to argue for

something more. In describing the "power" that literature possesses that might "enable" one to see "as a seal might see," Buell skirts ever so close to grounding environmental writing in nature, to making these texts somehow "closer" to the world.

When he writes of seeing "as a seal might," Buell is probably alluding to Lopez's encounter with a seal in the Prologue of Arctic Dreams. After describing the brief encounter where he and the seal stare at each other in silence, Lopez writes, "To contemplate what people are doing out here and ignore the universe of the seal, to consider human quest and plight and not know the land, I thought, to not listen to it, seemed fatal" (13). My dissertation shares Buell's concerns regarding the disjunction of text and world. As with Foreman, Sessions, and Campbell previously, Buell sounds the alarm over the dangers of focusing on texts alone and fatally ignoring how we affect the world and how it affects us. However, their railing against contemporary theory for "effacing the world" is misguided, for any alternative to the disjunction of text and world seems to invoke a correspondence of sign and world, a move that "grounds" the text and makes a claim to truth. Such a move towards closure is precisely what Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard fear most. Lopez tells us that our scientific theories, our maps, our landscapes are shot through with desire and are constantly undermined by new experience: "scientists working in the field know that what they see in the field always has the potential to contradict what they have read or been told" (95). To believe that we know and fully understand the world is to be arrogant. To regard it as mysterious and strange, always beyond "our charts and the catalogs" (172), is to be respectful and humble.

Scott Slovic's Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing (1992) was published several years before Buell's Environmental Imagination, but I refer to Slovic's work now because

I see my dissertation as a furthering or "theorizing" of it. In the first line of his introduction, Slovic quotes Sharon Cameron who suggests that "to write about nature is to write about how the mind sees nature, and sometimes how the mind sees itself" (qtd. in Slovic 3). As I have shown, Buell's concern with "facticity," "dual accountability," and "real toads" takes him in quite another direction. Slovic argues that the "chief preoccupation" of writers such as Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard is with "the psychological phenomenon of 'awareness.' . . . [they are] in quest not only of consciousness itself, but of an understanding of consciousness" (3). This "awareness" is also described by the writers Slovic studies as "seeing," "paying attention," and being "attentive" to nature:

By confronting face-to-face the separate realm of nature, by becoming more aware of its otherness, the writer implicitly becomes more deeply aware of his or her own dimensions, limitations of form and understanding, and processes of grappling with the unknown. (4)

Slovic sees these writers as "literary psychologists," as "epistemologists," and as "students of the human mind" (3, 18). His book is an effort "to illuminate the purposes and processes of 'paying attention' in American nature writing since Thoreau" (17).

Beginning with the writings of Stephen Kaplan, Slovic outlines a theory of mind, suggesting that "when we look at the world, we tend to rely upon previously stored information . . . Although we may generally feel certainty when we perceive external reality, we are actually making what Kaplan calls 'best guesses' and *not* perceiving everything thoroughly in detail" (7). I feel that Slovic is not clear enough with such terms as "reality" and "perception." Nonetheless, his observations on Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard are extremely persuasive. Abbey and Dillard, he

argues, attempt to "stimulate our attentiveness to nature" and to "our delusions of certainty" by upending the "system of perception" upon which we rely. These two writers "place special emphasis on the startling, sometimes even desperate, unpredictability of the natural world" and recount "with particular avidness experiences in which perception has not been probable and definite" (8). Slovic argues that Abbey and Dillard, as well as Lopez, try to stimulate our awareness of the unfamiliar within the "familiar," the exotic amidst the "likely."

Further, Slovic writes that, in contrast to Abbey and Dillard, Lopez enacts "a gradual and almost linear progression toward a deepening of awareness. . . . emphasiz[ing] the ongoing process of mental growth" (12). Slovic's chapter on Lopez focuses on how Lopez deviates from the "dazzling erraticness" of Abbey and Dillard with a "persistent movement toward the world" (12). Lopez is described by Slovic as "a writer who has undertaken to supplement 'mathematical knowledge' with 'particularized understanding' in order to achieve full appreciation--or awareness--of his subject matter" (151). These two poles--knowledge and the particular--are reflected in Arctic Dreams in Lopez's "exhaustive use of historical and scientific sources" and in his experiences "in person" (Slovic 151-2). Slovic suggests that Lopez pushes beyond the "merely mathematical" in Arctic Dreams through his emphasis on his own "insecurity, his vulnerability. . . . even gawking wonderment" (16). "One of the purposes of Lopez's writing," Slovic states, "is to develop an 'intimacy' with the landscape that does not interfere with attentiveness (by causing excessive comfort and ease), but rather fuels it and deepens it" (16). Lopez tries to "overcome the absurdity--the meaninglessness and destructiveness--of man's estrangement from the natural world" by reporting to us the exotic and by enriching "our understanding of the familiar" (150). Every one of us can achieve a "particularized

understanding of the land itself" since it is a product of "imaginative scrutiny but not necessarily mystical vision" (153). Slovic suggests that the whole of Arctic Dreams is an attempt to "overcome the limitations which aggressive desire places on the imagination" (164). Lopez's depiction of his own "newly open awareness" indicates a hopefulness which "envelopes the reader" (165). Borrowing a phrase from an interview with Lopez, Slovic calls nature writing a "literature of hope" which might lead to "wholesome political change" (18). It is a literature which is also concerned, "perhaps primarily so, with interior landscapes, with the mind itself" (18).

Departure

In some ways my dissertation begins where Slovic's work ends, further theorizing his notions of "mind" and "external reality." I noted above that Slovic is not precise enough with terms such as "reality," and I feel that the same can be said of phrases such as "man's estrangement from the natural world" (150). What is the process of this "estrangement," and what does he mean by the "natural world"? Are we truly not a part of it? Beginning with a detailed analysis of Lopez's Arctic Dreams, my dissertation defines more precisely and focuses more particularly on these terms and especially on these writers' understanding of "desire" and "mystery." My analysis focuses on one particular work of each author: Lopez's Arctic Dreams, Abbey's Desert Solitaire, and Dillard's Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. I have chosen these particular texts because all three are the only placed-based book-length works of non-fiction of each author, and as such are generically related; each is arguably the best-known work of each author, often taught in environmental literature courses; each work is still being reprinted, some in anniversary editions; and the scope of this dissertation would not allow the study of the various texts of non-

fiction, fiction, and poetry of each author. I hope that my dissertation will lead to similar analysis of other works by these authors.

Lopez, in an interview from which Slovic quotes, describes the act of writing. Sitting in the woods, pencil in hand, "working with these symbols on paper. . . . you look to the side and there will be a wolf spider making eye contact with you" (qtd. in Slovic 150). Here I will begin my "departure" from Slovic, who suggests that Lopez's writing lifts us "toward a newly receptive state of mind"--what Slovic describes as "awareness"--in the same way that the presence of the spider jars Lopez from the world of symbols. The spider does make Lopez aware of the "world you inhabit as a creature," but I also read the incident as an example of what is called in psychoanalytic terms the "uncanny": The spider's world, its particularity, is a kind of surplus which threatens the stability of the world which Lopez, like any one of us, projects. Lopez is very much aware of the spider's world and recognizes that he is an object within it. He is caught in the gaze of the Other, experiencing himself as an object. The spider's gaze resists symbolization; Lopez can never see the world, including himself, as the spider sees it. Uncanny encounters with animals and similar moments of acute awareness, even unease, abound in Lopez's writings, especially Arctic Dreams. Introducing more than just a "newly receptive state of mind," these moments highlight the anxiety we must endure when facing the fact that our reality is contingent and arbitrary, that we never have direct access to the world unmediated by our own consciousness and innocent of desire.

In the second chapter of my thesis, I argue that Lopez's exploration of the natural history and human history of the Arctic illustrates how all of our knowledge and perception is bound to desire, but "desire causes the imagination to misconstrue what it finds" (Arctic Dreams 256). In

these studies of Arctic history and in his own sojourns in the Arctic, Lopez recognizes the play of desire: the desire of scientists, explorers, industrialists, native peoples, animals, even himself. For example, Lopez discusses the field observations of biologists studying polar bears and the "desire" of those biologists "to verify conjecture . . . in the wild" (45). Lopez explores in detail the desire of some scientists to find that "tantalizing bit of information" that will make all of their information "mesh." More disconcerting, however, is industry's interest in this information and its "desire for a 'standardized animal,' one that always behaves in predictable ways" (270)

The movement of this kind of desire is a central theme in the works of Lacanian cultural theorist Slavoj Žižek. In Looking Awry, Žižek notes that an object looked at "matter-of-factly, disinterestedly, objectively . . . [is] nothing but a formless spot" (Looking, 11-12). A polar bear is a blur of white in the landscape. A wolf spider is a dark dot. "The object assumes clear and distinctive features only when we look at it . . . with an 'interested' view, supported, permeated, and 'distorted' by *desire*" (12). Žižek suggests that the object of desire "is an object that can be perceived only by a gaze 'distorted' by desire, an object that *does not exist* for an 'objective' gaze. . . . [since] in the movement of desire, something comes from nothing" (12). In this way, the *interest* of industry constitutes an animal that is "objectively" nothing, but which, viewed from industry's perspective, assumes the shape of "something." It is in this manner that the remarkable correspondence with the exploration of desire undertaken by Lopez and the writings of Žižek provides a theoretical framework for my thesis.

Lopez explores the role of desire in the exploits of the Arctic explorers, from those searching for the Northwest Passage to those searching for scientific data on narwhals. These searches are always in a framework of fantasy which legitimates desire by constructing the object

of desire itself as a worthy goal. The construction of fantasy is negotiated between the individual and the social; undue influence by either pole results in psychopathic drive for a goal, the significance of which few can comprehend, or for a goal so overdetermined by socio-political ideology that its searchers lose themselves, even their lives, in its pursuit. Lopez provides examples of the extremes of desire and the tragic results in the harsh landscape of the real, unsymbolizable Arctic beyond any fantasy.

The paradox of desire is that, despite its distortions and its impossibility, we must persist in it. To forsake the dialectic that occurs between ourselves and the Other is to eliminate any chance of revising our understanding of the world through experience. Desire is a vector that directs us towards a crisis: discovering the unfulfilling nature of the object of our pursuits. But this vector is away from ourselves, the familiar, the "known," and towards the mysterious. In Arctic Dreams, Lopez celebrates those individuals who, driven by a desire to explore or research, retain the capacity to be surprised by the world, either in their explorations or research. It is such wonder and respect that Lopez describes as an "attitude of regard" (228) whereby we follow our desires to discover new places, new scientific data, or new theories, but remain vigilant regarding the desire for closed, finite understanding. We must become intimate with our place yet remain alert to the possibilities of the strange and wonderful.

Lopez highlights the fundamental gap between the strange, unknowable land and our symbolizations of it, the world of the wolf spider and the one existing as "symbols on paper" (Slovic 150). The land is fundamentally mysterious, and if we approach it with an "uncalculating mind" we will recognize in our designs what Žižek calls a "traumatic *surplus of the Real over the Symbolic*" (Everything, 235) which renders our "familiar" unfamiliar: animals behaving

uncharacteristically, plants growing outside their microhabitats, people with inscrutable worldviews. These symbolizations are always threatened by the particulars of the Real which "stain" the categories we create. It is this stain which Lopez sees as "fundamental." It is that which renders our fantasies uncanny. It is the gaze of the spider as Lopez sits writing in the woods.

Our ethical obligation is to give rein to our desire but also to regard the object of that desire, such as the land, with alertness, to see it as uncanny. The very source of the land's dignity is this "fundamental strangeness" which can never be exhausted by our desire: the "life-world" of an arctic fox, the changing relationships of flora and fauna in a bioregion. Lopez cautions that, if we are complacent, those who have vested interests in effacing our awareness of that gap (Lopez uses the oil industry as one example) might direct their schemes against the land "with impunity." He suggests that one of the possible ways of understanding the idea of growing "rich" is "to retain a capacity for awe and astonishment in our lives, to continue to hunger after what is genuine and worthy" (Arctic Dreams 13-14). This paradoxical attitude of "awe" and "hunger" is the foundation for what Lopez calls a "regard from which dignity can emerge" (405). It is the principle of his ethic.

Within this framework, the movement of desire and the dignity conferred by the recognition of the unknowable, my dissertation moves to a detailed analysis of Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire and Annie Dillard's Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, showing how each author comes to a similar ethic: Abbey through audacious adventure and anarchist polemics; Dillard through a lyrical and rapturous exploration of a world of fecundity, death, and mystery. Chapter Three focuses on Desert Solitaire, a text which holds an unquestionably central place in the "canon" of

American nature writing, yet remains extremely contentious and inscrutable. Critics have described the book as a "celebratory vision" and a "wake-up alarm" (Stewart 196) and as an effort at "consciousness-raising" (Slovic 100). I concentrate mostly on the text's radical instability which results from Abbey's "complex mixture of personal narrative, journalism, philosophy, natural history, political commentary, and storytelling" (Payne 153) and the narrator's "guises" as "satirist, environmental advocate, lyricist, philosopher-scholar, buffoon-drunk, naturalist, [and] storyteller" (Morris 22). This instability, which Slovic suggests results in a "condition of elevated, though not comfortable, awareness" (93), parallels the instability of our reality, Abbey's "world of words" (Desert Solitaire xxi). Abbey, narrator and protagonist of his text, continually tries to confront "the bedrock which sustains us" (6), but admits that, despite his attempts, the "quality of strangeness in the desert remains undiminished" (242). For Abbey, wilderness is "in our blood" and yet "beyond us" (167). This contradiction is the paradox and the ethic in which we must persist: trying to comprehend a strange, beautiful, and dangerous earth despite the impossibility of ever knowing it.

Annie Dillard's Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is the central focus of Chapter Four. In Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Dillard both stalks and waits "alone and alert," knowing that "something is everywhere and always amiss" (180). Slovic notes that through her "encounters with nature and her use of language," Dillard "awakes to her participation in and distance from the organic world" (10). She gains particular knowledge through her personal experience of that world, experiences that delight and horrify her. She is traumatized by the realization that there are aspects of the world she inhabits that are beyond the understanding of science, beyond language, and beyond what Dillard calls "the only world I know" (176). She struggles to accommodate her

new experiences into her own "universe of meaning" and suffers terror, revulsion, and nightmares as a result. Dillard does not place final authority in scientific theories despite her constant reference to various scientists; the world for her is always delightfully, frightfully new. She remains open to the "gifts" given freely "from the universe" which surprise and startle her, leaving her breathless and dizzy. Dillard "survives" a world that is constantly shattered by these new experiences by adopting an attitude of alertness and openness to those experiences which mark her with knowledge that is hers alone: "I've been there, seen it, been done by it" (241). Her desire to "explore the neighborhood" will always bring her in contact with the startling and disturbing, but the openness with which she faces the world, waiting for what could be rapture or terror, is the same courageous and ethical stance, the same "attitude of regard," that we find in both Lopez and Abbey.

The concluding chapter of my dissertation begins with a study of the correspondence between the ethic found in the texts of these nature writers and the critical use of the term "love" by writers such as Marilyn Frye, Julia Kristeva, and Theodor Adorno. I then move to a comparison of this ethic of love with writings in several key movements in environmental thought: postmodern science, environmental pragmatism, and ecofeminism. Finally, I explore the connections between the "attitude of regard" found in the texts of Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard and contemporary re-evaluations of democracy by Slavoj Žižek, Chantal Mouffe, Richard Rorty, and William Connolly, extending my discussion of ethics and nature writing into a more overtly political arena. I argue that the nature writers and the political theorists are engaged in similar projects in adjoining terrain, and that the affinities in the projects enrich the reading of both. In brief, the "enlightened respect" for that fundamental strangeness

which stains our knowledge of the world makes possible the subversion of any "totalitarianism":
Left, Right, environmental, industrial, identitarian, legal, etc. We must be true to our desires and
explore the world, trying to understand the Other as best we can, always recognizing and
cultivating mystery within individuals, groups, and the world.

CHAPTER TWO

Barry Lopez's Bow of Allegiance

In the preface to Arctic Dreams: Imagination and Desire in a Northern Landscape, Barry Lopez describes two moments in which the book "finds its origin." One is the occasion when he "went on a walk for the first time among the tundra birds" (xix). The other moment occurred when he passed by the grave of Edward Israel, a young man who died on an arctic expedition in 1884. It is the first of these moments that I find the more perplexing, its meaning more difficult to grasp. Walking on the tundra in the Ilingnorak Range of Alaska, Lopez comes across a small horned lark: "She stared back resolute as iron" (xix). He finds a similar reaction from Lapland longspurs and snowy owls. His response to their "wild glare" is to bow:

I took to bowing on these evening walks. I would bow slightly with my hands in my pockets, toward the birds and the evidence of life in their nests--because of their fecundity, unexpected in this remote region, and because of the serene arctic light that came down over the land like a breath, like breathing. (xx)

It is initially difficult not to read Lopez's gesture as self-dramatization or as a kind of worship of the non-human. Indeed, the bow might even make us uneasy in the way we would feel witnessing a particularly pathetic or obscene public display. Arctic Dreams is, in a way, an apology for this bow.

The epilogue of Arctic Dreams also closes with a bow, "deeply, toward the north" (415). It is between these two gestures that we come to an understanding of Lopez's ethic--an "attitude of regard" (228) for the land--and of how his bow can be conceived not as a show of an intimate personal connection to the land or as a sign of worship but as an embodiment of an ethic whereby

he acknowledges the "fundamental mysteriousness" (257) of the land, the source of its dignity.

Lopez's exploration of the natural history and human history of the Arctic illustrates how all of our knowledge and perception is bound to desire, but "desire causes the imagination to misconstrue what it finds" (255). Lopez directs us to follow our desires to discover new places, new scientific data, or new theories, but also to be constantly vigilant of the desire for closed, finite understanding. He highlights the fundamental gap between the landscape and our symbolizations of it, and cautions that, if we are complacent, those who have vested interests in effacing our awareness of that gap might direct their schemes against the landscape "with impunity" (401). Lopez suggests that if we approach the land with an "uncalculating mind" (228), we will recognize in our designs particulars which render the familiar unfamiliar. Our ethical obligation is to give rein to our desire but also to regard the object of that desire, the land, with alertness, to see it as uncanny. The very source of the land's dignity is this "fundamental strangeness" (12) which can never be exhausted by our desire.

The Uncanny: "beyond the familiar"

Early in his prologue to Arctic Dreams, Lopez recounts an event which happened to the whaling ship *Cumbrian*:

A month before she entered Lancaster Sound in 1823, the *Cumbrian* killed a huge Greenland right [whale], a 57-foot female, in Davis Strait. They came upon her while she was asleep in light ice. Awakened by their approach, she swam slowly once around the ship and then put her head calmly to its bow and began to push. She pushed the ship backwards for two minutes before the transfixed crew reacted with harpoons. The incident left the men unsettled. They flinched against such

occasional eeriness in their work. (4)

This event will serve as a starting point for my reading of Arctic Dreams. It is a rich example of the uneasy feeling described and felt by Lopez at various times in the text: hunting with native people, exploring alone on the tundra, visiting an oil refinery. It is an unease that arrives not in the encounter with the unfamiliar but rather in the encounter with the unfamiliar *within the familiar*. Why, for example, was the event described above unnerving to the whalers at all since these men were used to the violent pursuit and killing of the world's largest animals? The answer lies not only with the odd, uncanny actions of the whale herself but also with the whalers' "reality" and their desires.

The actions of the whale--calm, focused, intentional (Lopez later notes that the men saw the whale as "urging them to go back" [5])--were probably quite unlike the usual actions of the whalers' quarry: rapid flight, violent retaliation, maybe innocent curiosity. The actions of this whale were different from what the whalers expected and thus rendered the whole scene unfamiliar and uncanny. What was familiar to the whalers no longer made sense; the impossible had happened.

Our "reality," in Lacanian terms, is like a quilt: the elements that make up that reality, its "floating signifiers," are "structured into a unified field through the intervention of a certain 'nodal point' (the Lacanian *point de capiton*) which 'quilts' them, stops their sliding and fixes their meaning" (Žižek, Sublime 87). Should one of these nodal points cease to mean in the way we expect, reality shifts and becomes uncanny. We then struggle to accommodate this change within a new reality, a new "structured network of meaning" (87). Comedian Jerry Seinfeld offers a wonderful example of this process. He reminds us of a television commercial for a stain-

remover in which someone is holding up a shirt with a hard-to-remove bloodstain. Seinfeld wonders aloud where a bloodstain that large might have come from. Perhaps the shirt's owner has bigger problems than laundry stains. Seinfeld's question renders the commercial uncanny, and its meanings shift when we focus on the gaping possibilities of the source of the stain itself. A strange, unnerving pall is cast over the commercial when Seinfeld re-introduces the "surplus-knowledge" of the cause of the stain (violence? an accident?). The stain now serves as a *point de capiton* that "requilts" the commercial.

The whale's calm push backwards served as a *point de capiton*, requilting reality in such a way that the elements of Lancaster Sound took on new meanings. She quite literally pushed them to account for her behaviour and her world in their own "structured network of meaning." And it appears that they could not do so readily. One would imagine that to do what they do, whalers must repress the possibility of a whale's world. But it was this "surplus knowledge" that returned. They could no longer ignore the possibility of the whale's desires, of her *umwelt*. As Lopez explains, "The world we perceive around an animal is its *environment*; what it sees is its *Umwelt*, or self-world. A specific environment contains many *Umwelten*, no two of which are the same" (*Arctic Dreams* n. 268). The whalers could not repress the unconscious knowledge that their own worlds, their fantasies, were contingent.

For two minutes the whalers stood in a world of possible *umwelten*: their own, the whale's, other whales', other animals', etc. A fissure appeared in the logic of their world, and it seems to have taken two minutes for them to suture it. They stood "transfixed" in the face of the traumatic eruption of *jouissance*: that unbearable overstimulation by the unsymbolizable Real both beyond and supporting "reality." Slavoj Žižek describes such an encounter with *jouissance*

between people:

When do I actually encounter the Other 'beyond the wall of language,' in the real of his or her being? Not when I describe her, not when I learn her values, dreams, and so on, but only when I encounter the other in her moment of *jouissance*: when I discern in her a tiny detail . . . which signals the intensity of the real of *jouissance*. This encounter with the real is always traumatic; there is something at least minimally obscene about it; I cannot simply integrate it into my universe, there is always a gulf separating me from it. (Žižek, Plague 49)

It is "through fantasy [that] *jouissance* is domesticated, 'gentrified'" (Žižek, Sublime 123). The deliberate push of the whale on the *Cumbrian's* bow can be read as that "tiny detail" which could not be domesticated or integrated by the whalers. It was outside their universe, their fantasies.

More precisely, the whalers were acutely aware of the whale's world because they were unquestionably objects within it. They were caught in the gaze of the Other. Žižek discusses the *point de capiton* or "spot" on our reality and its relation to the gaze with an example from Alfred Hitchcock:

The fact that this spot ultimately coincides with the threatening gaze of the other is confirmed in an almost too obvious way by the famous tennis court scene from *Strangers on a Train*, in which Guy watches the crowd watching the game. The camera first gives us a long shot of the crowd; all heads turn alternately left and right, following the path of the ball, all except one, which stares with a fixed gaze into the camera, i.e., at Guy. The camera then quickly approaches this motionless head. It is Bruno, linked to Guy by a murderous pact. Here we have in pure,

distilled from the stiff, motionless gaze, sticking out like a strange body and thus disturbing the harmony of the image by introducing a threatening dimension.

(Looking 116)

Here are all the analogous elements of the whale encounter. The tennis court is a familiar place made unfamiliar by the "surplus knowledge" that Guy has concerning Bruno, whose stare makes Guy aware that he himself is an object in Bruno's pathological reality. Lancaster Sound, like the Arctic *in general*, was familiar enough to the whalers but was made unfamiliar by the gaze of the whale; like Guy, the whalers are forced to see themselves as objects in a reality with which they were absolutely unfamiliar. The whale, a disruptive "strange body," disturbed the "harmony" of the whalers' world. The "threatening dimension" is then the knowledge that their own world is absolutely contingent.

This incident also serves as a strong illustration of the difference between "reality" and what Lacan terms the Real. The accumulated knowledge concerning right whales belongs to the realm of language, the Symbolic Order. This particular whale, however, behaved in an unsettlingly different manner. She was Real. Her strange actions, her history, her flesh, her desires could be neither predicted, repressed, nor adequately symbolized. Such particularity breaks through our quilted fabric of reality and makes us anxious and confused because the familiar world we have projected before us is suddenly made uncanny.

The eerie right whale incident occurs early in Arctic Dreams, and the whalers' unsettled feelings are mirrored in the text by other people in the Arctic including Lopez himself. "Eskimo" hunters are described as being "more afraid than we are" on a daily basis (201). Many of the arctic explorers' voyages described by Lopez include strange, violent reactions to the animals

they encounter, reactions that perhaps betray a fundamental unease with the landscape and a pathological attempt to reassert control. A biologist describes his unease with the means used to gather information on polar bears. Lopez himself is often unsettled by events he witnesses and places he visits. He feels "uncomfortable" when he begins to examine a drugged she-bear. While skinning a bearded seal, he is unsettled by the realization that "the ice under [his] feet *could suddenly melt*" (244). He is frightened by the "unbridled" mixture of joy and violence when hunting with "Eskimos": "I am not entirely comfortable on the sea ice butchering walrus like this. . . . The killing jars me" (408). He is especially ill at ease during his visit to the oil fields at Prudhoe Bay (394-401). From the "familiar chill" he feels when his credentials are examined to the unfamiliar proportions of buildings and "outsize equipment" to the "unsettling" distrust and "cursing of women" among the workmen--this whole experience is shot through with a sense of anxiety.

All of these passages share a sense of unease which, like the incident with the right whale, comes from a "strange body" in a "familiar" setting. Something renders each scene uncanny: a landscape that is never predictable, pathologized animals that do not behave like animals "back home," the particular amidst the statistical, the repressed knowledge of the sea under the ice or of our violent capabilities, the "hidden enemies" of the oil industry (396). In each case, someone is faced with the threatening dimension of the return of repressed knowledge within the borders of the familiar. The land is always strange, "fundamentally mysterious." It can never be adequately accommodated within our individual understanding of it.

This sense of anxiety which runs through Arctic Dreams is not, however, presented as evidence of our alienation from the natural world or as a symptom of a world out of balance. It is

instead the germ of possibility, a trace of the "survival of the capacity to imagine beyond the familiar" (176). Those two minutes in which the "transfixed" whalers stood on the *Cumbrian's* deck destabilized the categories they had constructed for the world and forced the whalers to experience the world in an altogether new way. This new perspective is perhaps one reason why the incident occurs so near the beginning of Lopez's work. It allows us to imagine the possibility of *umwelten* other than our own. Here then is a clue to understanding Lopez's bow toward the horned lark of the preface: This gesture is perhaps a recognition of the lark's unknowable *umwelt*, one of the elements of the scene which Lopez knows he cannot fully accommodate within his understanding of the land.

The uncanny experience on the *Cumbrian* was brief, of course, and the whalers then "reacted with harpoons." After all, they had a job to do. The harpooning transformed the whale into a commodity and an object they could adequately symbolize. Once again the whale's *umwelt* was repressed. So too was the carnage associated with the hunt: "'Here and there,' the [*Cumbrian's*] log reads, 'along the floe edge lay the dead bodies of hundreds of flensed whales . . . the air for miles around was tainted with the foetor which arose from such masses of putridity'" (5). Such appalling waste, had the whalers thought about it, might also have functioned as a "strange body" in their reality. It surely would to most of us today as the excesses of industry are becoming harder to ignore or symbolize, and thus render our industrial-reality "uncanny."

Desire: "a geography only of the mind"

The uncanniness of situations, the anxiety and unease that arise when the unfamiliar stains the familiar, is tied to our desire. It is the anxiety of realizing that the fantasy-reality we

have created is a fiction. As well, Žižek writes, "The fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed--and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire" (Looking 6).

Rendering a fantasy uncanny risks exposing our desires for what they are: impossible. The Lacanian understanding of desire is that it can never be satisfied, for what we seek is a non-symbolic unity with the Other, to close the gap that separates us from the world around us. This true object of our desire is impossible and, therefore, fundamentally repressed. Our lives are re-oriented towards endless substitutes for the impossible object of our desire. That is, *we desire first* and then "find" an object to substitute for that which we can never attain. It is not the material object per se that attracts our interest, but rather its structural place as the embodiment of the impossible "x" we desire (33).

How could the whalers of the *Cumbrian* have continued their hunting with the brutal realization that the thing they set out to catch and kill, the thing they desired, was a living, intelligent creature with desires of her own? How could that creature possibly have been the object of their desire? For something to function as the object-cause of desire, it "must appear to be *found* and not *produced*" (Žižek, Looking 32). In pursuing the object, we must "fall prey to the illusion that the power of fascination belongs to the object" (33). And although any object can serve as the object-cause, some "little piece of the real" must "fill out the place of this void that gapes at the very heart of the symbolic" and function as the object of desire (33). Except for those two minutes alluded to earlier, the whale filled out the place of the void. Ultimately, the whalers' harpoons solved their brief crisis by transforming that particular whale into oil, a commodity whose inertness and broad use-value was easily integrated into the symbolic network

of capitalism. The fantasy-reality of the whalers was once again sutured tight; their world was once again "familiar" and made sense. This new object, oil, was, however, nothing but another link in a chain of substitutions posing as the Thing, yet in effect hiding their desire.

As its subtitle suggests, one of the central concerns of Arctic Dreams is the workings of desire. Lopez finds in the history of arctic exploration desire and determination which still the imagination(386). His study of this history foregrounds the way in which desire produces its own object, the dangers of desire's repression of the Real, and the paradoxical imperative to pursue the object of desire despite its "nothingness" and its inability to satisfy. When Lopez turns to the study of arctic exploration, he notes, "Arctic history became for me, then, a legacy of desire" (309). He begins his study with the medieval journeys of the Irish monks. "I began thinking of frail and exposed craft," he writes, "My God, what had driven them?" (307).

Time after time, men voyaged to the arctic regions in search of places that never existed. Their desires created places that not only embodied the "nothingness," the impossibility of desire, but the places themselves had no material existence apart from the fabric of the maps on which they were depicted. St. Brendan and his fellow monks sailed for the fabulous "Isles of the Blessed." The belief in an arctic land "which lay beyond all the malevolence symbolized by the barbarians" was "one of the most powerful projections of the Western imagination" (315). Later explorers sailed for a Northwest Passage to Cathay. Lopez writes, "The quest for such a corridor, a path to wealth that had to be followed through a perilous landscape, gathers the dreams of several ages. . . . [that of] finding the material fortune that lies beyond human struggle, and the peace that lies on the other side of hope" (308).

Gaining its greatest momentum in the Elizabethan Age and lasting right up until the

1820s, the search for the Northwest Passage was ostensibly the search for an ice-free trading route. European explorers

were searching for lands and straits they knew existed but which they had never seen; and they could not believe they did not exist when they failed to find them.

As there was a Strait of Magellan at Cape Horn, they thought, so too there should be a northern strait. . . . Did not the most learned references of the day, the sea charts, depict such a passage? (293)

Hundreds died trying to find this strait of mere conjecture: "fatal shipwreck after shipwreck, bankruptcy after bankruptcy, the expeditions continued, strung out on the thinnest hopes" (311). These quests are rich examples of the retroactive action of desire which projects its own object-cause. The religious and economic fantasy-reality of the explorers created objects which guaranteed the meaningfulness of their desires and their "reality." The "hoped-for islands and straits" gave "material" existence to the nothingness of desire. They embodied *objet a*, the perpetual stand-in for the repressed Thing. Lopez describes the "entangled desires" of the cartographers and explorers as perpetuating a "geography only of the mind" (294).

We can think of the quest to reach the North Pole in the same way. It is really nothing but an abstraction. It "exists" only in the Symbolic, the realm of language, as a set of geometric co-ordinates. Lopez describes how these co-ordinates are, in fact, an *average* of the varying position of the Pole (18). Yet scores of people have risked all to reach "the Pole": a point in space made significant only by the difficulty of getting there. It is not surprising that Lopez notes how some men on various arctic voyages "struggled mightily to find some meaning in what they were doing in those regions, for the very act of exploration seemed to them at times completely

mad" (310). For others, however, the fact that their "geography only of the mind" existed on contemporary maps acted as a guarantee that their thoughts were consistent with the "real" world. Such a guarantee functions as an "answer of the real": "the psychotic kernel that serves as a support for (symbolic) reality" (Žižek, Looking 34). Reading the writings of men who were perplexed by the arctic quests, Lopez finds evidence of officers "who believed completely and indefatigably in what they were doing" (Arctic Dreams 360).

Why was it that these men's desire was oriented towards such dangerous and speculative goals? Lopez suggests that "[m]ore exploration, by far, was instigated. . . . with the underwriting of men of commerce, war, and religion, who went out for commercial gain or for national or religious conquest" (311). But he notes later that it would be "presumptuous" to think that all the men who perished in these expeditions died thinking that they had "given their lives for something greater" (361). Still, the records of the voyages tell of courage and determination "so extreme as to seem eerie and peculiar rather than heroic" (308). Understanding such determination lies in part with an understanding of the relationship between desire, *objet a*, and fantasy or, in an example which Lopez examines in great detail, between desire, the Northwest Passage, and the attitude of British naval exploration.

I discussed the role of fantasy in some detail with the example of the *Cumbrian's* crew. The world that made sense to them included the pursuit of whales for oil, baleen, etc. In that fantasy, whales embodied and gave material existence to *objet a*--a material existence which acted as a *point de capiton* holding the diverse elements of their fantasy in place. Žižek writes:

what the fantasy stages is not a scene in which our desire is fulfilled, fully satisfied, but on the contrary, a scene that realizes, stages, the desire as such. The

fundamental point of psychoanalysis is that desire is not something given in advance, but something that has to be constructed--and it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire. (Looking 6)

In those elements of the whalers' fantasy--trade, labour, money, risk, adventure--we can recognize how the fantasy itself orients and legitimizes the whalers' desire for the object-cause: whales to be harvested, to be converted to useful substances, to pay the bills. Whaling made sense. Whalers understood their "position" in the whale trade. By contrast, the desire of many of the explorers who followed after the whalers, especially the British, was organized less by a capitalist scenario and more by a nationalistic fantasy of security, duty, and superiority.

Most arctic naval exploration, up until the tragedy of the Franklin expedition of 1845, was carried out by the British. Lopez suggests that

[i]t is worth pointing up the failures of British exploration. The constitutions and desires of all the men involved in this experience were not the same; the complexities of economics and military duty, and the vision of men like John Barrow, placed other men in positions where they struggled for comprehension and meaning in a landscape that contradicted what they did. (Arctic Dreams 361)

Guided by his "lofty sense of purpose" to "enhance English prestige in the world" (343), Sir John Barrow, Second Secretary of the Admiralty and founder of the Royal Geographic Society, gave the search for the Northwest Passage a "military and scientific cast" and even demanded control over all the records of William Parry's spectacular expeditions (1818-1827) in an effort to "influence public emotions" and preserve a "tidy and inspiring image of the enterprise" (356-7). Barrow, in short, helped create and maintain a nationalistic fantasy which "inspired" men to find

the Northwest Passage rather than leave it to foreigners, a possibility that Barrow called "an act of national suicide" (357).

Sir John Franklin made four Arctic campaigns between 1819 and 1845. England was so fascinated with the stories of his journeys' hardships and his perseverance that he became a national hero. Part of the disaster of his final expedition lies with incorrect geographical observations made by James Ross in 1831, yet Lopez uses the Franklin Expedition to focus on the failure of attitude of British naval exploration in the Arctic. "Its failure," he argues, "was its ethnocentrism, its *attitude* of moral and technical superiority to the Eskimos, its perception of the land as deserted and unamenable" (360, my emphasis). Lopez notes that even during the years of searching for Franklin and his men, the British persisted in "trusting the superiority of their terrible winter clothing" and "refused to use dog sledges because they felt it demeaned human enterprise to have dogs doing the work men could do" (n. 360). In a land where native peoples had lived for centuries, British men eventually "ate their dogs, and then their clothing, and then they turned to each other" (360).

Lopez's most poignant observations on the British attitude come with his recounting of the fate of Franklin's second-in-command, Captain Francis Crozier, and the one hundred and four men who perished with him. With Franklin dead and their ships frozen in ice for the past two years, Crozier and his men tried to reach a settlement south and east across the land and ice from King William Island. Crozier and his "forty starving and debilitated men" encountered four Inuit families who gave him and his men seal meat but left the following morning. Lopez explains, "The thin resources of that part of the Arctic would not support the four families and a party of forty men, and the Eskimos knew it" (380). Crozier and his party became more destitute and

"continued to fall in their tracks" until the last of them died together apparently trying to kill the returning snow geese (380).

Lopez uses this incident to highlight the fantasy of these men and its horrible dissolution. When "technology and British naval tradition proved inadequate to the task, [Crozier's] complacency was shattered" (380). Lopez writes that Crozier "was reduced to begging from people he regarded as socially and morally inferior, people who counted for nothing against what he felt his own people stood for, by any comparison of accomplishment" (380). Crozier and his men were oblivious to the details of the land that might have helped them survive: "The land was not empty, but it teemed with animals that would sustain men only in a certain, very limited way. To know this you either had to live there or depend on the advice of the people who did" (383). It was later discovered that Crozier and his men carried with them such items as "calf-lined bedroom slippers" and "blue and white delftware teacups" (380). Their "structured network of meaning" was tragically inadequate for survival, and their ignorance of the particulars of the land left them lost: "they struggled for comprehension and meaning in a landscape that contradicted what they did" (361). Lopez bluntly states, "Crozier and his men died because they had, truly, no idea where they were. The cocoon they travelled in split open exposing them to the elements. Their authority was useless to them" (383). That "cocoon" was their fantasy-reality, and the influence on their reality and their desires by men like Barrow and the explorers before them was so powerful that the Real of the Arctic went unacknowledged and disregarded until it was far too late.

One of the paradoxes of desire is that, despite the impossibility of our ever fulfilling it, we must persist in it. Žižek writes of the Lacanian "radical *ethical* attitude, that of 'not ceding

one's desire'" (Žižek, Looking 63). To renounce desire is to regress to "psychotic drive," forsaking the chain of impossible-objects of desire. In this formulation, a psychotic is understood as one who maintains a "distance from the symbolic order" and is therefore outside "the symbolic community" (79-80). The psychotic has conflated the gap between his own fictional universe and social "reality" into a unique "psychotic universe" (81) wherein satisfaction of desire results from the "repeated failure to attain its object" (Žižek, Everything 229). There is no movement from one object of desire to another, but fixation on one which can never fill the Lack.

Lopez's description of Robert Peary, the first man to the North Pole, can be read as an example of such "psychotic drive." Peary's life was a singular quest to achieve something "many [the symbolic community] could not catch the importance of" (Arctic Dreams 389). Peary's drive for the North Pole, for that accomplishment that would make him unique, instead made him a "blustering" caricature of himself, caused him to lose joints from all ten toes to frostbite, and made him a bitter, "conniving" man who spent his final years defending his obsession. "What is the point," Lopez asks, "at which the 'tragic' loneliness of an individual, which drives him toward accomplishment, no longer leads but effectively confounds the well-being of the larger society?" (390).

Lopez finds that nearly all of the journals and biographies of the explorers "share a dissociation with the actual landscape. The land is made to fill a certain role, often that of adversary, the *bête noir* of one's dreams" (358). Peary's drive to reach the North Pole created an Arctic that is nothing but a "dramatic setting for personal quests and heroism" (356). Lopez argues that "the distance between . . . the unpossessable land and Peary's appropriation of it . . . is

a generic source of trouble in our own time. The landscape can be labeled and then manipulated. It is possible, with insistent and impersonal technology, to deny any innate order of dignity in it" (389). Peary leads the way for those who wish to conquer and make "productive" what they see and describe as a vast, blank, malevolent Arctic.

Such drive denies the possibility of "traversing one's fantasies" by repressing absolutely the experience of unsymbolizable Real. To let desire regress to drive, to fixate on the object-cause of desire to the point of psychosis, where the dialectical relationship of Self and Other is replaced by a wholly Imaginary relationship with the impossible *objet a*, is to become like Peary: solipsistic, misunderstood, marginalised, and lonely. To pursue a desire wholly structured by the Symbolic, however, is to shut out the Imaginary and forsake one's own experiences for the dictates of the Other. In both of these cases, the subject's fantasy is held so rigidly and defended with such vigour that the Real cannot break through: reality is constructed beforehand. Apart from these men, Lopez singles out a few explorers whom he feels retain the capacity to be surprised by the Real: not foreclosing on experience with an overly Symbolic fantasy where all is received (the tragedy of Crozier) and not foreclosing on experience with an Imaginary relationship which precludes interaction with the Other (the tragedy of Peary).

Lopez is taken with St. Brendan and his fellow monks for the attitude with which they ventured in the Arctic. The themes of the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani Abbatis* are "compassion, wonder, and respect," quite different to the themes of "property, lineage, bloodshed and banishment that distinguish the later Icelandic sagas" (316). Lopez's praise of the monks is in itself noteworthy: "These impeccable, generous, innocent, attentive men were, one must think, the perfect travelers" (316). They were perfect in their ability to allow wonder into the fantasy

supporting their desire.

Lopez also celebrates the attitude of John Davis and Lieutenant William Parry. The "exemplary" Davis, the "least warlike and piratical of [the West Country sailors (Drake, Raleigh, Cavendish, Frobisher)]," possessed a "serene disposition" and was "a loyal and courageous man, tolerant of other people's differences" (333). His accomplishments on his journeys are "stunning." Besides mapping most of the Labrador coast and hundreds of miles of the Greenland coast, he made notes on currents, ice, animals, plants, and ethnographic descriptions of the native peoples he encountered (332). Lopez describes Davis's first meeting with the native people of Greenland as "one of the most memorable of meetings between cultures in all of arctic literature" (328). When the native people spotted them and made "great outcries and skreechings" like the "howling of wolves," Davis called on the orchestra he had brought along to play and "directed his officers and men to dance." The native people approached them and they made friendly contact. The next morning, the ships's crews were awakened by the native people playing their own drum, "dancing, and beckoning to them" (328). Lopez notes that "Davis's courteous regard for the Eskimos is unique in early arctic narratives" (328). In all, Lopez singles out Davis for the "lack of overbearing design on the land that distinguished [his] voyages," and for his "mature wonder" (358).

The excursion into Lancaster Sound by the "singular" William Parry is described by Lopez as "one of the most admirable and engaging, not to mention successful, of all arctic voyages" (347). Like Davis, Parry made extensive observations on particulars of the Arctic including the sun's halos and arcs, various birds and animals, and the archeological remains of a "paleo-Eskimo camp." Though "deferential" to the great explorers before him, Parry corrected

many of their geographical mistakes. Also like Davis, Parry had a great regard for his men and made efforts to keep them healthy and content during their long winter stay. His success was largely a result of his regard for the capriciousness of the arctic seasons and his ability to adapt to them. Like Brendan and John Davis, Parry had the desire to explore a dangerous and unpredictable part of the world but retained what Lopez would call a "respectful attitude" towards that which is "beyond the familiar" of his fantasy-reality.

The Stain: "fundamental strangeness"

Even with Davis and Parry, the scientific observations made by arctic explorers were usually subordinate to the cartographic aims of their journeys. But as the Arctic came to be seen as having commercial value in itself--furs, minerals, oil--the quantity and quality of scientific research increased. The object-cause of desire shifted its locus. But Lopez argues that even these more detailed explorations of the arctic landscape, fuelled by new desires, often proceed with arrogance and ignorance:

We delineate the life history of the ground squirrel. We list the butterflies: the sulphurs, the arctics, a copper, a blue, the fritillaries. At a snap. We enumerate the plants. We name everything. Then we fold the charts and the catalogs, as if, except for a stray fact or two, we were done with a competent description. But the land is not a painting; the image cannot be completed this way. (172)

There is always something that escapes our naming. The lists, charts, and catalogues Lopez describes are always abstractions of experience of the Real. They are the product of a desire to have everything in the categories we make for them: *a place for everything and everything in its place*. But something always escapes even these fantasies; that which is repressed returns to

render reality uncanny. The kind of delineation Lopez criticizes is an attempt by researchers to efface the uncanny, to make familiar the "fundamental strangeness in the landscape" (12) which disrupts our reality.

Arctic Dreams is filled with indications that little "out there" (95)--whether referring to "the field" of biological research or the landscape in general--is static or fixed within the limits our names create. The North Star moves. The North Pole moves. Magnetic north moves. Continents shift. Currents shift. The paths and movements of animal migrations in the Arctic are in flux. They are "difficult to hold in the mind" and complicated because "animals are always testing the landscape" (161). They are not fixed entities. They escape our "Aristotelian and Cartesian sense of animals as objects, our religious sense of them as mere receptacles for human symbology, our singlemindedness in unraveling their workings" (150). Even our cataloguing of the plants in different arctic microhabitats "founder on the particulars" of the landscape. Lopez writes, "One is better off with precise and local knowledge, and a wariness of borders" (159).

Lopez devotes a great deal of Arctic Dreams to detailed observations on arctic biology and those biologists who "delineate" the life histories of arctic animals. To speak of species, of species and their environments, of their niche in an ecosystem, biologists must reduce the complexity of the world to manageable models. Here we have repeated that first movement into the register of the Symbolic. Words and fictions substitute for the Real. In the field, biologists collect their data out of which they construct statistical models of the Real. These substitutes can be more or less adequate for predicting the behaviour of a polar bear, for example, but they are not real bears, nor do they correspond perfectly with any particular bear "out there." They are empty signifiers. Lopez notes:

The desire to verify conjecture, to witness spontaneous, unstructured events in the wild, is of course very sharp among field biologists. Nothing--no laboratory result or field-camp speculation--can replace the rich, complex texture, the credibility, of something that takes place 'out there.' And scientists working in the field know that what they see in the field always has the potential to contradict what they have read or been told. (95)

Indeed, how can a statistical model be sufficient and adequate for an animal that experiments, that is curious? "No matter how long you watch," Lopez writes, "you will not see all it can do" (96). There is always a gap between language and the Real, between the biologists' conjecture and the "something that takes place 'out there.'" More accurate research may narrow that gap but will never close it: "while experiments can be designed to reveal aspects of the animal, the animal itself will always remain larger than the sum of any set of experiments" (269). In all the details Lopez catalogues concerning the lives of muskoxen, polar bears, and narwhals, there is one constant refrain: about so much of the lives of animals "we know next to nothing" (130).

Given the tendency of animals to escape their names, how do biologists sleep at night? Would they not be troubled by the "return of the repressed," those thousands and millions of animals that were not sampled in the biologists' research? Lopez suggests that biologists are aware of the gap between their designs and the world, and that they experience a degree of "distress" when they must perforce generalize. Biologists know that "the behavior of an individual animal may differ strikingly from the generally recognized behavior of its species; and that the same species may behave quite differently from place to place, from year to year" (269). For the biologists to proceed, however, that gaping unknown must be repressed, made

insignificant. But Lacan tells us that what is foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real (Žižek, *Sublime* 72). So how do they sleep? Biologists sleep when they are satisfied that they have sampled enough individuals to theorize about the whole, that their model is adequate.

Yet every model, every theory, every conjecture biologists construct is 'stained' by the real animals "out there." The stain is a "traumatic *surplus of the Real over the Symbolic*" (Žižek, *Everything* 235). It is the point from which an object gazes at us, a gaze to which our access is always already barred. The *umwelt* of a particular animal, for example, is fundamentally inaccessible and thus unsymbolizable for biologists. To regard the gaze of a particular animal is to become aware of the impossibility of closing the gap between the Symbolic and the Real since that "life-world" cannot be known or contained in a model. The anxiety produced by the stain pushes biologists to construct new models which accord more closely with their experience of the Real through their field research. But the stain never disappears; the gap never closes.

Although biologists create models from their observations and statistics, their "animal" is a product of desire; it always remains a fiction. In fact, it is not really *anything* at all. It is *objet a*: "an object that can be perceived only by a gaze 'distorted' by desire" (12). It has no existence beyond this gaze. A white ursine-shaped object in the distance becomes a "polar bear" only through an interested, desiring gaze. But its *umwelt*, its "world," escapes. The "signified" of the animal in the distance is, in fact, its name: it is a polar bear because it has the features of the animal we call "polar bear." The same can be said for the statistics on the page or in the computer. There is nothing there until observed by an "interested" gaze which names and produces "something from nothing." A close approach to a particular animal risks an encounter with the void at the centre of the "animal" biologists have created, risks the anxiety of *knowing*

too much.

But biologists experience another kind of "distress." Lopez notes that they are "anxious about 'the tyranny of statistics' and 'the ascendancy of the (computer) modeler'" (Arctic Dreams 270). He notes that biologists are bothered by the arctic oil, gas, and mining industries' approach to research: narrow, hasty, and overly statistical and abstract (270). "Industry, which pays most of the bills for this arctic research," writes Lopez, "is less interested in the entire animal than it is in those aspects of its life that might complicate or hinder development--or, to be fair, how in some instances industry might disrupt the animal's way of life" (269). From scientific information, the desire of industry, like the desire of the explorers and the biologists, constructs its own object-cause. Lopez notes:

The kernel of information is a dot in space; interpretations grow out of desire to make this point a line, to give it a direction. . . . The possibilities make good scientists chary. In a region like the Arctic, tense with hunger for wealth, with fears of plunder, interpretation can quickly get beyond a scientist's control. (127)

Industry in the Arctic is especially interested in the "constitutive" features of the animal: those irreducible elements which remain constant in all situations. The particulars of the individual members become marginal in the face of statistics that constitute the animal. Industry wants the statistics on the page to be the animal in its entirety. It wants to convince itself and others that there is no gap between the model and the animal, that there is no stain. Industry's "interested" gaze, distorted by desire, perceives a "standardized animal" where there is really no animal at all. But that certain statistical "x" which guarantees the identity of the animal, "perceived as a point of supreme plenitude of meaning," is "in its bodily presence nothing but an embodiment of a

certain lack" (Žižek, Sublime 99). It is the *point de capiton* for their desires and the embodiment the impossible *objet a*.

Where biologists are aware of the difficulties involved in creating a "relatively complete and accurate view of an animal's life, especially in the Arctic, industry desires a "'standardized animal,' one that always behaves in predictable ways" (Arctic Dreams 270). The "surplus knowledge" of the biologist--for example the "striking" differences in the behaviour of individuals of a species--must be repressed, perhaps even suppressed, from industrial decisions. This is reflected in the "discreet request by industry that scientific consultants structure environmental data in a helpful way" (357). Lopez notes how frequently one encounters "[a] belief in the authority of statistics" in environmental assessments (270). Industry has a vested interest in repressing the stain of particularity, in closing the gap between the Symbolic and the Real, since that gap is the place where environmentalists, government regulators, native peoples, and others find reasons to stop industrial development.

Lopez gives examples to show that biologists' anxiety concerning the oil industry is not unwarranted. Consider the results of a Canadian Government report which noted that subsea drilling in Lancaster Sound "would not be expected to be a hazard" to narwhals: animals which use sound for echolocation and communication. Lopez writes, "It is hard to believe in an imagination so narrow in its scope, so calloused towards life, that could write these last words. . . . [T]he idea that [narwhals] are intelligent, and that they would be affected by such man-made noise, is not so much presumption as an expression of a possibility" (140). That "possibility" is the stain on the Government's report; it is the "surplus knowledge" that cannot be contained in its assessments. The narwhal at the centre of the report is nothing but a fictitious creature, a name

masking a void which Lopez describes as "a mystery we can do no better than to name 'narwhal'" (140).

Against such standardizing thought which represses the stains of the Real, Lopez hopes for "the survival of the capacity to imagine beyond the familiar" (176). For Lopez, *mystery* always lies beyond the familiar. Variations on the word mystery appear dozens of times in Arctic Dreams. Animals are "understood as mysterious. . . . They are changeable, not fixed, entities, predictable in their behavior only to a certain extent" (177). But it is not only animals that are mysterious:

The land, an animal that contains all other animals, is vigorous and alive. The challenge to us, when we address the land, is . . . to see the subtle grace and mutability of the different landscapes. They are crucibles of mystery, precisely like the smaller ones they contain--the arctic fox, the dwarf birch, the pi-meson; and the larger ones that contain them, side by side with such seemingly immutable objects as the Horsehead Nebula in Orion. These are not solely arenas for human invention. (412)

It is incumbent upon us to "preserve some of the mystery within [the land]" when we make our charts and lists. Mystery is precisely that stain on the world which renders the familiar, our reality, uncanny. It is the unpredictable landscape which explorers must respect. It is the stare of the horned lark to whom Lopez bows. Where the identifying and standardizing approach of industrial interests can lead to tyranny, "an attitude of regard" for the mystery beyond our abstractions eludes such oppression and guards "against a kind of provincialism that vitiates the imagination, that stifles the capacity to envision what is different" (176).

Desire, Mystery, Dignity: "you know the land knows you are there"

Lopez suggests that in encountering a landscape for the first time "[a]nother remembered landscape makes this one seem familiar" (259), but this new place cannot be wholly familiar, and any notion that it is, or ever can be, suffers from a failure of imagination and "attitude":

Whatever evaluation we make of a stretch of land, however, no matter how profound or accurate, we will find it inadequate. The land retains an identity of its own, still deeper and more subtle than we can know. Our obligation toward it then becomes simple: to approach with an uncalculating mind, with an attitude of regard. To try to sense the range and variety of its expression--its weather and colors and animals. To intend from the beginning to preserve some of the mystery within it as a kind of wisdom to be experienced, not questioned. And to be alert for its openings, for that moment when something sacred reveals itself within the mundane, and you know the land knows you are there. (228)

This quotation from Arctic Dreams serves as wonderful encapsulation of the ethic that imbues the whole work and pulls together the threads of the uncanny, desire, and the stain of particularity into that ethic. Here Lopez formulates this ethic as an obligation: we *must* approach the land with curiosity and openness, and with attention towards the mysterious.

The first sentence of this passage indicates the presence of desire: like explorers, we approach and evaluate a stretch of land; we move immediately from the visceral experience of a place to a symbolic understanding of it. Elsewhere in Arctic Dreams Lopez writes, "I knew that mixture of satisfaction and desire--to know exactly how one is situated in the vastness; and that wish to fully comprehend the space a map renders and sets borders to" (280). "[T]o know

exactly" and "to fully comprehend the space" describe the working of desire and fantasy where we move from experience of the Real to that "structured network of meaning" which gives coordinates to our desire and constitutes its object: "our perceptions," Lopez writes, "are colored by preconception and desire" (255). We experience *jouissance* in "exhilarating and sometimes terrifying new places" (280) then move to regulate it through fantasy. But despite their distortions, evaluation and fantasy must not to be abandoned.

Lopez writes, "the desire to comprehend, which, however I might try to suspend it, was always there" (404). We cannot "suspend" desire nor should we try. As I described earlier in discussing Robert Peary, there is no escape from the workings of desire except for "psychotic drive" which "'encircles' its object . . . and finds satisfaction in its own pulsation, in its repeated failure to attain its object" (Žižek, Everything 229). This drive short-circuits the dialectic of Self and Other, of the subject and the world, forsaking the impossible-object of desire for a psychotic obsession. Žižek explains how

the ethics of pure desire compels us to avoid not only the debilitating contentment with the pleasures provided by the objects of phenomenal reality but also the danger of yielding to fascination with the Thing, and being drawn into its lethal vortex, which can only end in psychosis or suicidal *passage à l'acte* [conflation of Symbolic and Real]. (Žižek, Indivisible 97)

It is imperative that we pursue our desire for the lost One through an endless chain of substitutes. Unyielding fixation with one object-cause arrests our ability to encounter and evaluate the unknown. We must desire and construct the Thing we search for and, when we "find it," declare "this is not *that*," and create a new object-cause, another substitute for the lost One. Through this

endless chain, the landscape itself becomes a product of our desire and language.

This land we construct through desire, far from being a fixed entity, is always already inadequate since the land "retains an identity of its own." This "identity" is the Real itself. To keep our "reality" intact and stable, we must repress the excess of the Real, the surplus that is constituted by and escapes our naming. But this surplus is of course the positive condition of the reality we construct. And, though it is repressed, "what is foreclosed from the Symbolic returns in the Real" (Žižek, *Sublime* 72). As an example of this return, Lopez describes an flight over the Bering Sea in which he fell to daydreaming:

The narwhals appeared in the middle of this reverie. . . . I stared dumbfounded while someone else shouted. Not just to see the narwhals, but *here*, a few miles northwest of King Island in Bering Sea. In all the years scientists have kept records for these waters, no one had ever seen a narwhal alive in Bering Sea. . . .

Who could say what this was, really? (127)

It might be understood as an eruption of the Real into a reality constructed out of years of experience by people living in and studying the area. The narwhals, quite literally "strange bodies," appear as a stain rendering the fantasy inadequate and the scene uncanny. Lopez "stared dumbfounded" and the four others with him "remained speechless, circling overhead in a state of wonder" (127), a state similar to the whalers on the *Cumbrian*, and for the same reason: the *umwelten* of the whales undermined the stability of their reality. And they were alert to this "opening."

Such uncanniness is the last thing industry wants: "For others, those with leases to search for oil and gas in Navarin and Norton basins, the possibility that narwhals may live there is a

complicating environmental nuisance" (128). The whales reveal the gap between the world constructed by science and the Real. At best, developers might claim that the appearance of the whales is an anomaly, that it is unnatural. But this is predicated on a nature that they "know" and can predict. The narwhals are a stain on this knowledge. They introduce the "threatening dimension" of the unaccountable and uncontrollable.

This stain of mystery on the world corresponds to the gaze of the Other, that which is particular to the Other, to which we have no access. To recognize this gaze is to reach the point where you recognize yourself as an object: "you know the land knows you are there." In the Prologue to Arctic Dreams, Lopez relates an incident where he was surprised by a seal appearing in the water under an oil drilling platform:

The seal and I regarded each other in absolute stillness. . . . Curiosity held it.

What held me was: how far out on the edge of the world I am. A movement of my head shifted the hood of my parka slightly, and the seal was gone in an explosion of water. Its eyes had been enormous. . . . I could not have been more surprised by the seal's appearance. . . . To contemplate what people are doing [in the Arctic] and ignore the universe of the seal, to consider human quest and plight and not know the land, I thought, to not listen to it, seemed fatal. (13)

The gaze of the curious seal moves Lopez to see himself as an object in the seal's world. In so doing, he becomes a true Lacanian subject, confronting "the utter nullity of [his] narcissistic pretensions" (Žižek, Looking 64). He can never see himself from the point at which the seal gazes at him, from the perspective of the narwhal, of the land. This gaze is the inexhaustible surplus knowledge, the "fundamental strangeness" of the land "to be experienced, not

questioned."

Towards the end of Arctic Dreams, Lopez writes increasingly about dignity: "A more radical Enlightenment is necessary, in which dignity is understood as an innate quality, not as something tendered by someone outside. And that common dignity must include the land and its plants and creatures" (405). It is our obligation to recognize dignity, to keep our minds open "for that moment when something sacred reveals itself within the mundane," when that which is mysterious and must not be violated becomes apparent within the known. This obligation is the necessary complement to desire. In Looking Awry, Žižek suggests an analogous ethic as a supplement to the maxim "do not cede your desire":

respect as much as possible the other's "particular absolute," the way he organizes his universe of meaning in a way absolutely particular to him. Such an ethic is neither imaginary . . . or symbolic. . . . What confers on the other the dignity of a "person" is not any universal-symbolic feature but precisely what is "absolutely particular" about him, his fantasy, that part of him that we can be sure we can never share. (Looking 156)

That which stains us, our particular "universe of meaning," is the source of our dignity, and it is by recognizing the contingency of our fantasy that "we can acquire a sense of the dignity of another's fantasy . . . as the way everyone, in a manner proper to each, conceals the impasse of his desire" (Žižek, Looking 157). Lopez asks us to extend this understanding to the land and thereby respect its dignity, its "fundamental strangeness." Otherwise, as Lopez writes, "Strip a person or the land of dignity and you can direct any scheme you wish against them or it, with impunity and the best of motives" (401).

Lopez knows that our desire is always at work when we look to the land, yet he directs us to adopt an "attitude of regard," to be "uncalculating" and "alert." He uses almost the same words to describe a ground squirrel he encounters on the tundra: "From its attitude I thought it was listening, confirming the presence of some threat" (37). The squirrel can take little in its world for granted. We must be alert like the aboriginal hunters Lopez stays with:

Their regard for animals and their attentiveness to nuance in the landscape were not rigorous or complete enough to approach an idealized harmony. No one knew that much. No one would say they knew that much. They faced nature with fear, with *ilira* (nervous awe) and *kappia* (apprehension). And with enthusiasm. (201)

Where *kappia* is an Inuit word for fear "in the face of unpredictable violence" (7), *ilira* is a kind of healthy respect for that "something sacred" in animals or the land, for mystery. *Ilira* is Lopez's ethic. Our obligation is to regard the land with alertness, to see it as uncanny, and continuously to shift our focus from our fantasies to the land's dignity, its mysteries, which can never be exhausted by our desire.

"In approaching the land with an attitude of obligation," Lopez writes, "willing to observe courtesies difficult to articulate--perhaps only a gesture of the hands--one establishes a regard from which dignity can emerge" (405). This passage explains precisely how we must understand Lopez's bow to the horned lark, the action which opens Arctic Dreams. He is approaching the lark, and the land, with an "attitude of obligation" and a gesture of courtesy. His bow is an acknowledgment the lark's dignity. At another point in Arctic Dreams, Lopez explains that he started "bowing to [the ground-nesting birds] out of regard for what was wonderful and

mysterious in their lives" (197). The bow is not an attempt to identify with the birds, to put himself *in their place*; nor is it to show that he respects the fact that they too are "living beings." It is a gesture recognizing the birds' *umwelten*, and the utter impossibility of adequately symbolizing the universe of any one of them. In the epilogue of Arctic Dreams, Lopez bows more generally "towards the north" and holds it until his back aches. Even so, he notes how he "glimpsed [his] own desire" and the "continuous work of the imagination" to bring together "what is actual" and "what is dreamed" (414). But there is always that which escapes the workings of desire and cannot be contained by the mind. So Lopez bows as "an expression of allegiance with the mystery of life" (414). It is a gesture of fidelity to respecting and preserving the land's dignity.

CHAPTER THREE

Edward Abbey and Loyalty to the Earth

Perhaps it is my late-twentieth century sensibility, but there are moments in Edward Abbey's Desert Solitaire when the author truly disturbs me. Re-reading his book prior to starting a detailed analysis from the perspective of the ethic found in Lopez's Arctic Dreams, I was startled by how often Abbey's text repulsed me. The narrator dreams of a "chocolate-colored mistress," he describes himself at one point as "drunk as a Navajo," he stones a rabbit and leaves it to the vultures, he complains endlessly about cattle and cattlemen then proceeds to fry up "a big thin tough beefsteak." Further examples are not difficult to find.

Just about everyone who comes to write about Edward Abbey must face the voice that narrates Desert Solitaire and his essays. Some writers apologize for Abbey. Some laugh and celebrate the irreverence and contradictions of "Cactus Ed." Most agree, however, that it is imperative to keep reading Abbey, to be offended, and to critique his work. Most agree that criticism is precisely what Abbey wanted most. Critics suggest that the voice of Desert Solitaire is a calculated effort "to confound," "to disarm," "to provoke," and "to shock, to electrify, to jar, to prod" readers out of lazy and habitual ways of reading and understanding.²

Abbey himself tells us as much. In the "Author's Introduction" to Desert Solitaire, he states:

much of the book will seem coarse, rude, bad-tempered, violently prejudiced, unconstructive--even frankly antisocial in its point of view. Serious critics, serious librarians, serious associate professors of English will if they read this

² see Payne 1996, Morris 1990, Knott 1996, Ronald 1982.

work dislike it intensely; at least I hope so. To others I can only say that if the book has any virtues they cannot be distinguished from the faults; that there is a way of being wrong which is also sometimes necessarily right. (xxii)

Abbey has deliberately constructed an intrusive narrative voice which is calculated to trouble a simple reading of the text as a record of Abbey's activities as a park ranger and of his love for the desert. His offensiveness, though "wrong," demands that we read and reflect in a critical manner which he believes is "right."

Scott Slovic writes that Desert Solitaire "imitates the startling effect of nature" and that "the unruliness of Abbey's text [results] in . . . a condition of elevated, though not comfortable, awareness" (Slovic 93). Slovic's reading is fruitful for coming to terms with the offensive nature of Desert Solitaire because he suggests that the reader finds a "bewildering conjunction of rapturous language and disconcerting subject matter" in a manner similar to the way in which Abbey encounters both the terror and beauty in the desert. To continue Slovic's argument in the Lacanian terms I have employed in analysing Arctic Dreams, I suggest that what Abbey has done with the narrative voice of Desert Solitaire is to take our desires to construct a coherent and consistent fantasy of its narrator into account. The "excess" (and excesses) of the narrator thwarts our efforts at making Edward Abbey wholly familiar or predictable, to locate "what is in Abbey more than Abbey."

"The desert," Abbey writes, "waits outside, desolate and still and strange, unfamiliar and often grotesque in its forms and colors, inhabited by rare, furtive creatures of incredible hardness and cunning" (242). Just as the Real is always already beyond us, the desert "waits outside" our symbolizing. And so too did Edward Abbey. Beyond the text and our concepts of Abbey--

narrator, author, polemicist, activist--there was the inscrutable, Real man: "unfamiliar and often grotesque." The reading of Desert Solitaire which follows is an attempt to show how, like the often-disturbing gap between the narrator and the unknowable "Edward Abbey," the desert is a "golden lure" to our desire but remains forever beyond our fantasies, our "world of words" (xxi). But acknowledging this paradox of unfulfillable desire and continuing in the search for understanding is, in Abbey's words, "an expression of loyalty to the earth" (167)

In an endnote to his essay, "The Structure and Unity of Desert Solitaire," Paul T. Bryant reveals that in the area where Abbey was a park ranger, there is a geological bed called the Paradox Formation, made of alluvial deposits on top of bedrock (Bryant 18, n2). Perhaps this formation was on Abbey's mind when in his first chapter of Desert Solitaire he sums up his desire to merge with a non-human world by stating simply, "Paradox and bedrock" (6). He also titles his final chapter "Bedrock and Paradox." The Paradox Formation, where Abbey descends through the accumulated sedimentary alluvium to the bedrock at the canyon floor, serves as a wonderful metaphor for Abbey's desire to get beyond the world created through language and ideas to the world "*out there*" (37). It is a metaphor for the desire to conflate reality with the Real. Unlike his descent to geological bedrock, however, Abbey finds that he can never truly merge with the bedrock of the Real.

In the first chapter of Desert Solitaire, Abbey describes a large rock as looking "like a head from Easter Island, a stone god or a petrified ogre" (6). He immediately recognizes his "tendency" to personify and notes that it is a tendency he wishes to suppress. This leads him to discuss some of the reasons why he is at Arches National Monument:

I am here not only to evade for a while the clamor and filth and confusion of the cultural apparatus but also to confront, immediately and directly if it's possible, the bare bones of existence, the elemental and fundamental, the bedrock which sustains us. I want to be able to look at and into a juniper tree, a piece of quartz, a vulture, a spider, and see it as it is in itself, devoid of all humanly ascribed qualities, anti-Kantian, even the categories of scientific description. To meet God or Medusa face to face, even if it means risking everything human in myself. I dream of a hard and brutal mysticism in which the naked self merges with a non-human world and yet somehow survives still intact, individual, separate. Paradox and bedrock. (6)

This is Abbey's Thoreauvian desire to live deliberately, to get to the "bedrock which sustains us." And for most of Desert Solitaire he attempts to get to that bedrock through communicating with the non-human, through reckless adventures, even through insanity.

Abbey does not, however, make it through to bedrock. Where Lopez acknowledges that the "land retains an identity of its own, still deeper and more subtle than we can know" (Arctic Dreams 228), Abbey recognizes that despite "years of intimate contact and search this quality of strangeness in the desert remains undiminished" (Desert Solitaire 242). It is in this statement that we can locate the same psychoanalytic ethic found in Arctic Dreams of "not ceding one's desire." Acknowledging the desert's undiminished "quality of strangeness" does not mean an end to desire, a resignation in the face of the impossible. Although he does not have unmediated access to "bedrock" of the Real, Abbey continues to pursue a desire he recognizes as impossible. This must be read as a "radical *ethical* attitude" recognizing the dignity of the desert--the wilderness,

the world--and thereby preserving it.

Desire and Bedrock

Standing and gaping at the landscape during his first morning at the Arches, Abbey feels "a ridiculous greed and possessiveness" and declares, "I want to know it all, possess it all, embrace the entire scene intimately, deeply, totally, as a man desires a beautiful woman" (5). His reference to the desire for a woman is especially apt since his desires are ultimately all the same: "All," including the beautiful woman, is that which was lost in the beginning: the Real, the pre-symbolized world to which his access is barred, the "bedrock." The idea of the "naked self merging with a non-human world" can be understood as the impossible desire to strip off the symbolic, even the human, and return to that pre-symbolic world forsaken for language. His clothing represents language and the symbolic, his separation from the world of the non-human.

One manner in which Abbey tries to "merge" with the landscape is through repeated wistful attempts to communicate with the animals he encounters. The rattlesnake he finds under the doorstep to his trailer does not heed Abbey's warning to stay away: "If I catch you around the trailer again I'll chop your head off" (18). A week later, when Abbey sees the same, or at least a similar rattler, he notes: "I have to keep my promise" (18). Later in the same chapter, Abbey chides himself for scrambling away from two gopher snakes that frightened him. If he had been more capable of trust, he suggests, he "might have learned something new or some truth so very old we have all forgotten it" (21). What is that "truth" other than the *umwelten* of these animals, their distinct life-worlds? Abbey has located this impossible "x" of his desire in the snakes.

Despite the futility of his efforts with the snakes, Abbey persists in his attempts to communicate with animals by turning to deer. Walking to Double Arch, he rounds a corner and

startles a doe and her fawn:

"Come back here!" I shout. "I want to talk to you."

But they're not talking and in another moment have vanished into the wind. (32)

Unlike Lopez in his encounter with the seal under the drilling platform, Abbey does not simply observe in wonder. He shouts his desire for contact. Abbey's cry to the doe and fawn is certainly not expected to bring them closer, but the attempt remains a humorous acting out of his desire to get to "bedrock," to merge at some level with the land, to confront the deer "immediately and directly" and learn something, such as the truth he might have learned from the snakes. Abbey's next attempt to communicate with deer--three does and a buck--is simply an invitation to join him in a drink (43). Of course the deer do not participate in this human ritual. Still, the invitation marks Abbey's move away from the attempt to "know" the deer and towards a recognition of their mysteriousness.

Before this encounter, he writes his signature in the sand under a juniper where he has found coyote tracks and droppings. He writes his name "to let [the coyote] know, to tip him off" (33). Exactly what is communicated to the coyote is unclear, but it seems that Abbey wants to make the coyote aware of his presence, perhaps simply of human presence. Abbey's actions in both the last encounter with the deer and this one with the coyote are similar to Lopez's bow on the tundra. There is no attempt to control or dominate through a demand, only the acknowledgment of the Others' presence. The unknowability of and respect for the animals' *umwelten* is implied.

The coyote communication is followed immediately by Abbey's capricious killing of the

"wicked rabbit" with a stone. This latter event undercuts to a degree the gesture of the signature, making it seem trivial and insincere. But the killing functions more as one of those destabilizing elements of the narrative, forcing us to question the narrator and any notion that we "know" him. And this is just the kind of attitude Abbey displays in his encounter with the coyote and with the does and buck. He does not presume to know how they experience the world nor does he make an awkward attempt to get this "truth" from them. His signature and his invitation are more like a friendly wave to strangers which recognizes their presence and indicates that the waver means no harm. They are gestures of respect.

Another way in which Abbey tries to merge with the landscape is through often dangerous adventures. "The desert," he writes, "is a land of surprises, some of them terrible surprises. Terrible as derived from terror" (114-5). The desert is a place where it is easy to get lost and die, to dehydrate and die, to break a leg and die, to drink poison water and die, to get heat stroke and die. Noting all of this, Abbey enters the wilderness of the desert repeatedly and gets lost, thirsty, and overheated. The foray into the desert is for him an alternative means to get to "bedrock," to confront a "far larger world" (97).

Though far from dangerous, Abbey's retreat to the wilderness is itself a kind of adventure. After leaving the city behind he participates in events such as cattle drives and a rescue search with smaller groups of men who live outside of the cities in smaller communities, closer perhaps to "bedrock." They are not "nervous men in tight collars" but men who "treat one another with courtesy and respect" (41-2). Abbey portrays most of the local people he meets as simple and honest, as if less removed than big-city dwellers from that which is "elemental and fundamental." I am reminded somewhat of Lopez's "admiration" for the native peoples of the Arctic with whom

he travels. Both narrators enjoy the frankness and directness of the conversations and the intimacy of many of these people's knowledge of the land. They respect the local people's understanding of the natural world, an understanding made richer through experiences which inform these people's understanding of a changing, unpredictable landscape and allow them to live within it.

The longest and perhaps most significant adventure of the book, recounted in the chapter "Down the River," is Abbey's trip with his friend Ralph Newcomb down the Colorado River through Glen Canyon "before it was drowned" (152). They arrive at the launching site with "camping gear, enough grub for two weeks, and two little rubber boats folded up in suitcase-sized cartons" (153). Among other things, they have forgotten life jackets. Before launching, Abbey notes,

The river looks immense and powerful, swollen with snow-melt from the western slope of the Rockies and from the Wind River Range in Wyoming, a veritable Mississippi of a river rolling between redrock walls. Our rubber boats, after we inflate them, seem gaudy, flimsy, and much too small. (153)

Though their preparations seem inadequate, the river is not as rough as they had anticipated, and the journey is relatively peaceful. All that is lost is, significantly, the road map Abbey brought along. "We are deep in the wild now," he states (166).

Their movement down into the canyon is, as mentioned earlier, the same movement as descending through the alluvium of the Paradox Formation to bedrock. The symbolism of being down "inside the *mantle* of the earth" is not lost on Abbey, who notes that he and Newcomb are experiencing a "rebirth back in time and into primeval liberty" (155). Abbey's solo hikes

(Newcomb has a bad leg) are slightly more dangerous forays than the river ride, but again the hikes follow a pattern of rebirth from the Escalante River's "womb" and out of the "underworld" of Glen Canyon (181, 193). At one point, Abbey even undresses and swims through a natural tunnel which blocks out the sky until he arrives at "very large grotto or chamber" lush with plants (187). The symbolic return to the womb seems complete.

As the journey down the river proceeds, Abbey and Newcomb "communicate less with words and more in direct denotation" (185), and Abbey finds himself "thinking river thoughts" (159). The journey can be read as another *attempt* to merge with the "bedrock which sustains us," through vivid, direct, unmediated experience with the pre-symbolic "elemental" world. It is a return to the "strange warmth and solidity of Mother Earth" (51), to her womb, to the Real. But in recounting the events of the trip, Abbey notes that between us and the world is "that screen of words, that veil of ideas, issuing from the brain like mental smog" (184). It is a screen through which he cannot penetrate. In the same chapter, he discusses the word "wilderness" and notes how the word suggests "something lost and something still present, something remote and at the same time intimate" (167). He calls this a "romantic view," but it is also an insightful description of the Lacanian Real which, though we have no unmediated access to it, remains the positive conditions of our "veil of ideas." Abbey and Newcomb's journey is rich in the experience of the wild, but there is no return to a womb beyond Abbey's own imagination.

In the chapter "Tukuhnikivats, the Island in the Desert," Abbey speeds away from his duties in the park to climb to the peak of Tukuhnikivats, a mountain south of Moab, Utah. Abbey gives us an indication that he has perhaps been alone a little too long by twice mentioning the woman he loves. It is late August, and Abbey has been working away from his wife since

April. Despite his preference for solo journeys, his attempt to confront the "elemental" is thwarted this time by his desire for love and company. At the 13,000 foot peak, Abbey attempts to pierce the "veil of ideas":

I strip and lie back in the sun, high on Tukuñnikivats, with nothing between me and the universe but my thoughts. Deliberately I compose my mind, quieting the febrile buzzing of the cells and circuits, and strive to open my consciousness directly, nakedly to the cosmos. Under the influence of cosmic rays I try for cosmic intuitions--and end up earthbound as always, with a vision not of the universal but of a small and mortal particular, unique and disparate . . . her smile, her eyes in firelight, her touch. (227)

The workings of his mind cannot be suspended. And certainly not the workings of desire. I do not refer here only to the sexual desire Abbey experiences, but also to that desire to understand the world, to contain it and stabilize it. Abbey tries, perhaps humorously, for "cosmic intuitions," final answers and truths to the mysteries of the universe, but they do not come. Even the idea itself that something "*out there*" can be possessed, fill our lack, and return us to a direct experience of the Real, is but a fantasy giving co-ordinates to desire. Abbey's experience is echoed somewhat in Arctic Dreams, when Lopez experiences an "intense reverie" on Axel Heiberg Island. Though he admits to losing "for long moments my sense of time and purpose as a human being," he finds "the desire to comprehend, which, however I might try to suspend it, was always there" (404).

Abbey's journey down from this mountain highpoint (lowpoint?) is another adventure in itself and can be read as an attempt to confront the elemental or even "to meet God or Medusa

face to face" through exhilarating experience. To cut down on the two hours it took him to make the summit of Tukuñnikivats, Abbey decides to ride a slab of rock down a snowfield almost to the timberline. The first of two rocks he sends down as experiments "turns on edge and bounds like a clumsy wheel all the way to the bottom, shattering on the rocks below" (228). The second bounces down like the first. Abbey rides the third rock: "Look at it this way, fellows--nobody lives forever" (228). Of course he makes it, but not without his allowing things to get "out of control." Even as he finally comes to rest "a few feet short of the broken rocks at the bottom of the couloir. . . . another loose object thunders by on my left, perhaps the same rock or part of it that I had started down with" (229).

The death-defying journey is again an attempt to get beyond the "veil of ideas" and experience the world directly, to experience oneself as an object, to merge "with the non-human" at the very border of life and death. But there is no epiphany or "cosmic intuition" as he limps back to his camp anymore than there was on the top of the mountain. There is no suspension of that "febrile buzzing of the cells and circuits." There is no union with the Real, only the memory of exhilaration and fear.

The final adventure which Abbey recounts in Desert Solitaire, before his departure for "Megalomania, U.S.A.," is his trip into The Maze with Bob Waterman. The chapter is entitled "Terra Incognita: Into the Maze," and it appears as if Abbey and Waterman are the first white men to explore this part of the "labyrinth of canyons" (257). The trip in by Land Rover is perilous, and the two men descend into The Maze itself by rappelling over a thousand feet to the "bedrock" at the canyon floor. They are not even sure there is a way up again once into The Maze: "But that problem can be deferred for a while. If necessary we've got enough food for two

days" (259). Although they do find a way out the same day, incoming foul weather forces them to leave the area: "Ecstasy and danger: we'll never get the Land Rover up those switchbacks if it storms" (261). Once again, Abbey tries to confront directly the "elemental and fundamental"--in this case, a potentially dangerous landscape that has never been explored by white men--but must admit that he has seen little of The Maze and that the "heart of it remains unknown" (261). Abbey comes close to the *objet a* and almost faces the Lack at the heart of his desire. But because he does not see all of The Maze, he avoids the traumatic confrontation with the nullity of his desire and The Maze still seems to hold some kind of secret knowledge, a secret "heart."

And here then is a paradox: the exploration of The Maze points to Abbey's desire to know, to conceptualize and symbolize it like the map in the sand which a mechanic draws to show Abbey and Waterman how to get to there. Yet this abstraction is exactly what he is trying to avoid when he confronts the non-human and tries to "see it as it is in itself." The Maze, the land itself, will always remain unknown, "bedrock," Real. All Abbey can hold onto is his own symbolic representation. Abbey discusses with Waterman what they should name the four formations they can see at one end of The Maze. Waterman asks, "Why call them anything at all?" (256). After some more discussion Abbey responds:

Through naming comes knowing; we grasp an object, mentally, by giving it a name--hension, prehension, apprehension. And thus through language create a whole world, corresponding to the other world out there. Or we trust that it corresponds. Or perhaps, like a German poet, we cease to care, becoming more concerned with the naming than with the things named; the former becomes more real than the latter. And so in the end the world is lost again. No, the world

remains--those unique, particular, incorrigibly individual junipers and sandstone monoliths--and we become lost. Again. Round and round, through an endless labyrinth of thought--the maze. (257)

And so, in Desert Solitaire we follow Abbey "round and round" through his adventurous attempts to merge with the "other world out there" and remain an individual consciousness. But, as he describes the paradox in this pivotal passage, he is always already lost, or, to turn it around once more, the world is always already lost to him as soon as he enters the world of language.

Abbey attempts another means of moving beyond the "screen of words" and experience directly the "bedrock which sustains us" by entering a state of insanity where language loses its meaning and the "cultural apparatus" becomes radically unstable. Abbey begins his stint as a ranger on All Fools' Day (8) and refers to one civic engineer he encounters as a "madman" (44). The insanity I wish to consider, however, is much less a kind of carnivalesque foolishness or an ideological shortsightedness, and more a state of psychosis where social reality, a frame within which "individuals relate practically to each other and the world that surrounds them (Žižek, For They Know 150), is renounced. Since the subject and the Symbolic Order are both constituted by language, psychosis is a state where the subject "does not recognize" the Symbolic Order and holds to socially excluded attitudes and beliefs (151). And it is here that Abbey again seeks to pass through the "mental smog" of language and the Symbolic to the world "*out there*."

The chapter "The Moon-Eyed Horse" can be read as an exploration of a state of psychosis. In the chapter, Abbey tells us of his attempt to recapture a horse which for ten years has lived outside any form of community. Abbey asks his friend Mackie what Moon-Eye does up in his dry canyon:

"He eats. He sleeps. He walks down to the creek once a day for a drink.

He turns around and walks back. He eats again. He sleeps again."

"The horse is a gregarious beast," I said, "a herd animal, like the cow, like the human. It's not natural for a horse to live alone."

"Moon-Eye is not a natural horse."

"He's supernatural?"

"He's crazy. How should I know? Go ask the horse." (140)

When Abbey finally finds Moon-Eye, he repeatedly asks the horse if he is crazy and points out how miserable and lonely his life is. It is not hard to see that Abbey is also talking to himself and questioning his own journey into the wilderness. It is worth noting that when describing the reasons for his sojourn in Desert Solitaire's first chapter, Abbey notes that he is "risking everything human" in himself. Moon-Eye's isolation has risked and perhaps lost *everything equine* in him. Abbey notes how Moon-Eye "didn't even smell like a horse" (145). Moon-Eye has become a skittish fright: "a spectre. Apocalyptic, a creature out of a bad dream" (144). He is portrayed as psychotic. His story is like an animal fable warning of the dangers of ceasing to hold a relationship with the Other, of rejecting the world we create through language in favour of a direct relationship with "the other world *out there*" (191). The fable suggests that the attempt to "merge with the non-human" and yet still be human is impossible.

The "Havasut" chapter describes Abbey's five-week stay in Havasut, a branch of the Grand Canyon. The events actually pre-date his work as a park ranger in Arches National Monument, but they are significant experiences with the same desert. As with his later stint in Arches, Abbey strips down to the essentials: bacon, beef, beans, and a sleeping bag. He wanders "naked

as Adam," spending his days dreaming and exploring. And going insane:

The days became wild, strange, ambiguous--a sinister element pervaded the flow of time. . . . I slipped by degrees into lunacy, me and the moon, and lost to a certain extent the power to distinguish between what was and what was not myself: looking at my hand I would see a leaf trembling on a branch. A *green* leaf. . . . I went for walks. I went for walks. I went for walks and on one of these, the last I took in Havasu, regained everything that seemed to be ebbing away.

(200)

Once again Abbey tries to escape the human world of language and merge with the "bedrock" of the Real, with the "*out there*." And as he slips, like Moon-Eye ("me and the moon"), into a state where he is no longer a "natural," "gregarious" human but a "supernatural" human, he does indeed seem to merge with the non-human. At least it seems so to his altered, psychotic perceptions. His own hand appears to him as a leaf on a branch. Despite this occurrence, however, he does not portray his lunacy as a movement towards a closer, more fundamental experience of the world but rather as a *loss* of his world; the experience is "ambiguous," even "sinister."

During one of his excursions in Havasu, Abbey decides to take a shortcut home and finds himself stranded in a slickrock basin, far from any possible rescuers, his canteen empty. Certain he is going to die, he begins to cry: "It was easy. All alone, I didn't have to be brave" (203). Death is the one way in which we do merge with the non-human. It is indeed a return to the "strange warmth and solidity of Mother Earth" (51). And it is the fulfilment of Abbey's desire, except for his demand to survive "still intact, individual, separate" (6). The Havasu episode

follows the same pattern as the rebirth-like swim Abbey takes during his trip down Glen Canyon, but this time the symbolic death comes frighteningly close to a real death.

The womb-like structure into which Abbey falls is "rich in dead and dying organisms" which unexpectedly close over his head as he drops into the stagnant water (201). The exit he had planned turns out to be an overhanging cliff, and he is forced to glimpse his "fate": "Fatal. Death by starvation, slow and tedious" (202). Confronting the Real possibility of his death makes Abbey cry three times: once in fright, once at the beauty of a cloud passing over, and once in rejoicing in his escape. Despite his wish to "merge with the non-human," Abbey is confronted by the terrifying anxiety of not knowing whether he will remain "intact" and "individual" after death. His desire cannot assimilate this unknown element into his reality. His desperate means of escape shows that Abbey chooses the "whole world" created through language, the Symbolic Order, over the unbearable *jouissance* of the unsymbolizable Real. His return from the cliff and the pool of primordial organic matter is a return from the psychotic limit between the Symbolic and the Real (Žižek, Looking 81).

The chapter that follows "Havasut" is, appropriately, "The Dead Man at Grandview Point." Abbey, his brother, and several other men are called upon to find a lost tourist in the vicinity Grandview Point. His brother finds the lost man: dead and lying peacefully under a juniper at a cliff's edge. The scene is the likely outcome of the "Havasut" chapter, had Abbey failed to escape. Abbey envies the man's fate:

He had good luck--I envy him in the manner of his going: to die alone, on rock under sun at the brink of the unknown, like a wolf, like a great bird, seems to me very good fortune indeed. To die in the open, under the sky, far from the insolent

interference of leech and priest, before this desert vastness opening like a window onto eternity--that surely was an overwhelming stroke of good luck. (212-3)

Abbey's praise of this "manner of going", not surprisingly, both agrees with and contradicts earlier descriptions of such a death. We remember, of course, Abbey's desperate escape from the slickrock basin and his unwillingness to go beyond "the brink of the unknown." Earlier in the text, Abbey calls falling off a horse from a heart attack and dying in the desert sun "a decent, clean way of taking off" (83). Dying of thirst and having your flesh "working its way through the gizzard of a buzzard" he describes as "a promotion in grade, for some the realization of an ideal" (118). Yet to Moon-Eye, an extension of Abbey himself, he describes the absolute horror of dying in the desert with waves of buzzards, lice, coyotes, ants, beetles, and blowflies coming to feast on one's corpse (148). What is especially unusual about this description of death is that Abbey describes it as if the dead were still conscious of these horrors: *merged* with the non-human but still *intact* and *individual*.

It is only in the *imagined* scenario which ends "The Dead Man at Grandview Point" that Abbey is able to fulfill his desire for a "hard and brutal mysticism" where he can merge "with the non-human." Abbey sees a vulture to the southwest and thinks of "the dead man under the juniper on the edge of the world, seeing him as the vulture would have seen him" (215-6). Suddenly the vision changes and Abbey sees himself "through those cruel eyes":

I feel myself sinking into the landscape, fixed in place like a stone, like a tree, a small motionless shape of vague outline, desert-colored, and with the wings of imagination look down at myself through the eyes of the bird, watching a human figure that becomes smaller, smaller in the receding landscape as the bird rises

into the evening. (216)

The point of view continues to move away from the fixed-in-place Abbey until it encompasses all that surrounds him: "that ultimate world of sun and stars whose bounds we cannot discover" (216). Here Abbey sees himself as a part of the landscape from the other side of the "veil of ideas." He is a true "subject" because, from the Lacanian perspective, "subjectification" is "strictly correlative to experiencing oneself as an object, a 'helpless victim': it is the name for the gaze by means of which we confront the utter nullity of our narcissistic pretensions (Žižek, Looking 64). He looks down upon himself from the place of the Other: a place from which he can never see himself except for just such an identification with a "juniper tree, a piece of quartz, a vulture, a spider" and the "bedrock which sustains us." This vision of his own death is an end to the division of Self and Other, to the "screen of words" that separates us from the "ultimate world," and to desire. But the vision is itself a part of that "endless labyrinth of thought" in which Abbey knows he is caught. He cannot escape the paradox of the unfulfillable desire to know the world "*out there*," of the maze of language which keeps us from confronting directly the bedrock of the Real.

Mystery and Paradox

The Paradox Formation serves as a metaphor for Abbey's attempts to get to the bedrock of the Real, but Abbey's text provides another rich metaphor for the desert, and indeed the world's, unknowability. In the chapter "Water," Abbey comes to "a peculiar little waterhole named Onion Spring" (116). Abbey carefully tastes the water and spits it out, rinsing his mouth with water from his canteen. The spring water contains sulfur and arsenic. He then give us advice on desert springs:

This poison spring is quite clear. The water is sterile, lifeless. There are no bugs, which in itself is a warning sign, in case the smell were not sufficient. When in doubt about drinking from an unknown spring look for life. If the water is scummed with algae, crawling with worms, grubs, larvae, spiders and liver flukes, be reassured, drink hearty, you'll get nothing worse than dysentery. But if it appears innocent and pure, beware. (116-7).

Although the "life"--the algae and other organisms--makes the water less clear and keeps us from seeing through to the bottom, it is our salvation. The spring's murky chaos is a sign of health. The "clear" water that allows us to see directly to the bedrock of the stream is clear only to eyes which cannot perceive the poison in it. If we consider the stream to be our fantasy-reality, what Abbey calls "a whole world, corresponding to the other world out there" (257), salvation and health lie in accommodating the unknowable "life" of the "other world." Otherwise we have a reality which, in its seeming clarity, is fatal.

Even in the face of the unsymbolizable Real, when we look awry and catch a glimpse of the workings of our desire, we cannot "suspend" it, nor should we try. As Abbey illustrates, there is no escape from desire except through psychosis or death. And the "radical *ethical* attitude, that of 'not ceding one's desire'" (Žižek, Looking 63), makes it imperative that we pursue our desire for the lost One through an endless chain of substitutes, the "veil of ideas." Abbey's paradox is that the land itself becomes a product of our language and desire, but to choose anything but language and the Symbolic Order, to cease to desire, is to opt out of any relationship with the Other. So we desire and thereby repress the excess of the Real, that surplus which is not only constituted by and escapes our naming, but is the positive condition of our reality, the bedrock:

"that *out there* . . . which surrounds and sustains the little world of men" (37). Like Lopez who glimpses his own desire even as he bows to "the mystery of life," Abbey recognizes the paradox of the unyielding desire to get to bedrock even as he regards that "other world" as "limitless," "unknowable," and "beyond us."

Almost the entire "Water" chapter of Desert Solitaire is a study of surprises in the desert, which Abbey calls "a land of surprises" (115). "More surprises," Abbey writes when describing Salt Creek "where the water looks beautifully drinkable but tastes like brine" (115). Later he notes, "[o]ther springs, more surprises" and proceeds to relate his experience at Onion Spring, the arsenic-laced waterhole described above. Thunderstorms seem to come "out of nowhere, out of nothing, a special creation" (118). Abbey was "surprised by delight" when he witnessed a flash flood: "I have stood in the middle of a broad sandy wash with not a trickle of moisture to be seen anywhere . . . and looked up to see a wall of water tumble around a bend and surge toward me" (120). After depicting a flash flood, Abbey immediately moves on to a study of quicksand: startling in its innocuous appearance and "sinister glamour" (123). Abbey also describes the life that springs out of rain-filled potholes, such as the spadefoot toad: "It's a strange, stirring, but not uncommon thing to come on a pool at night, after an evening of thunder and lightening and a bit of rainfall, and see the frogs clinging to the edge of their impermanent pond, bodies immersed in water but heads out, all croaking away in tricky counterpoint" (125). Surprising, delightful, improbable, strange--the desert that lies "*out there*" beyond Abbey's fantasy-reality breaks through, destabilizing any attempt to make it familiar. Even for a "desert rat" like Abbey the desert is frequently unfamiliar, uncanny.

On several occasions in Desert Solitaire, Abbey relates his experiences of the uncanny

much like the experience of Lopez's whalers on the *Cumbrian* or of Lopez himself when he is surprised by narwhals in Bering Sea. It is already dark when Abbey begins his return trip to camp after exploring the Escalante River. As he grows tired and hungry, the river he knew on the way upstream has changed: "The Escalante is no longer the free and friendly place it was during the day but totally different, strange, unknown and unknowable, faintly malevolent" (179). The darkness and Abbey's fatigue combine to make the Escalante's unknown but dangerous possibilities--getting lost, falling, starving, etc.--more difficult to repress. The familiar trip becomes *unheimlich*. On another side trip to Rainbow Bridge, Abbey rests "[a]lone in the silence":

I understand for a moment the dread which many feel in the presence of the primeval desert, the unconscious fear which compels them to tame, alter or destroy what they cannot understand, to reduce the wild and prehuman to human dimensions. Anything rather than confront directly the ante-human, that *other world* which frightens not through danger or hostility but in something far worse--its implacable indifference. (191)

Again Abbey, though possessing a great deal of experience with the land in this area, feels a kind of dread when the strangeness of the desert pierces his reality, when the Real returns.

The sense of uncanniness he feels during these hikes is similar to his experiences in Havasu some years earlier, where "the days became wild, strange, ambiguous" and pervaded by "a sinister element" (200). And of course his close brush with death in the stagnant basins made his fantasy almost totally unravel and reduced him to tears. It is interesting to note that several times Abbey describes a sense of "dread" and "terror" at the "sinister" and "malevolent" in the

desert. On three occasions when he goes to sleep Abbey has dreams which he describes as nightmarish (205) and haunted by disaster (163, 257). All these examples suggest that the desert is at times only too Real for Abbey. Since his knowledge of the desert certainly must include its dangers and its seeming hostility, the proximity to such danger and the loss of the repressing force of his consciousness make it difficult to keep the frightening possibilities of the desert at bay. The repressed knowledge returns in his dreams and during overwhelming experiences of *jouissance*. His dread, triggered by his intimate knowledge of the desert, is strikingly similar to *ilira*, the "nervous awe" felt by the Inuit who live on the land in the Arctic (Arctic Dreams 201). It is a kind of fear born out of the knowledge that the landscape always remains mysterious despite one's experience.

The desert does not always seem so menacing to Abbey. He also describes the strangeness of the desert in terms of wonder, often with sacred overtones. After relating the differing symbolic meanings which Delicate Arch holds for its visitors, including "proof for or against His existence" (Desert Solitaire 36), Abbey turns to his own ideas about its significance. He suggests that it lies "in the power of the odd and unexpected to startle the senses and surprise the mind out of their ruts of habit, to compel us to a reawakened awareness of the wonderful--that which is full of wonder" (36-7). Abbey finds the other arches "anticlimactic" after Delicate Arch, but he does note that Skyline Arch lost a "big chunk of rock" in November of 1940. Like the continuous changes in the arctic landscape of Arctic Dreams, Skyline Arch indicates that even the sparse and still desert is in flux and retains the capacity to startle.

When he makes proposals "for the salvation of both parks and people," Abbey argues that since we do not drive cars into cathedrals or "other sanctums of our culture," we should not drive

them in parks. We must show them deference as "holy places. . . . We are learning finally that the forests and mountains and desert canyons are holier than our churches" (52). Later while he explores the Escalante, Abbey is struck by the "mysterious" subcanyons, the "magical green of grass," and the "clear song of the canyon wren" (177). He asks, "Is this at last the *locus Dei*?" (177). Abbey does not, however, locate God in the wilderness. His comparisons to cathedrals and churches are better understood as an attitude of wonder for the unknown and unknowable:

If man's imagination were not so weak, so easily tired, if his capacity for wonder not so limited, he would abandon forever such fantasies of the supernal. He would learn to perceive in water, leaves and silence more than sufficient of the absolute and marvelous, more than enough to console him for the loss of the ancient dreams. (177)

In a similar way, Lopez suggests that the earth itself is a "mysterious entity" and that, though our evaluations are always "inadequate," we must maintain "the capacity to imagine beyond the familiar" (Arctic Dreams 228).

Abbey's "capacity for wonder" is an opening of the mind to the mysteriousness of this world. Rather than marvelling at the stars and worlds beyond Earth, Abbey notes, "[t]here are mysteries enough right here in America, in Utah, in the canyons" (249): the unfamiliar amidst the familiar. This is his "Paradise": "the Paradise of which I write and wish to praise is with us yet, the here and now, the actual, tangible, dogmatically real earth on which we stand" (167). Like Lopez's "crucibles of mystery," from the arctic fox to the Horsehead Nebula, Abbey's "real earth" is full and "mysteries enough." If we foster our "capacity for wonder," we retain the ability to be "surprised by delight" and terror, and to perceive in both the clear and the brackish waters of the

desert waterholes "more than sufficient of the absolute and marvelous."

In case of paradox, "launch forth boldly"

In the chapter "Episodes and Visions," Abbey tells tales about the visitors to the park who arrive on the last big weekend of the season. Summer is ending, and as he looks toward Tuckuhnikivats and the other high peaks, Abbey notices fresh snow. "Very attractive," he notes, "I prefer the desert" (239). This launches Abbey into his most penetrating and detailed consideration of why he is so attracted to the desert. What unfolds in these passages is a rich and insightful study of desire and mystery.

Abbey begins by remarking that he prefers the desert "[b]ecause--there's something about the desert. Not much of an answer" (239). But it is an answer. That "something" is precisely the *objet a*, that elusive object-cause of desire. Our lives are spent trying to find substitutes for the lost Thing, to give positive existence to our lack. The desert is an object of Abbey's desire, and just like the mountain for the mountaineer and the sea for the seafarer, the desert holds the structural place as the embodiment of the impossible "x" of desire, of "bedrock." The desert is "sufficient of the absolute" and at the same time the embodiment of a void of meaning, what Abbey calls "a thing without meaning or a meaning which includes all things" (36). It is both paradox and bedrock.

When Abbey tries again to identify "the peculiar quality or character of the desert," what is *in the desert more than the desert*, he is forced to describe a paradox:

In trying to isolate this peculiarity, if it exists at all and is not simply an illusion, we must be aware of a danger well known to explorers of both the micro- and macrocosmic--that of confusing the thing observed with the mind of the observer,

of constructing not a picture of external reality but simply a mirror of the thinker. Can this danger be avoided without falling into an opposite but related error, that of separating too deeply the observer and the thing observed, subject and object, and again falsifying our view of the world? There is no way out of these difficulties. (240)

There is a great deal of constructing, reflecting, and mistaking going on in this passage, but Abbey seems to argue that although every "picture of external reality" is false, we must find a balance between constructing a model that suffers from a lack of experience with the Real, and a model that is considered to be an absolutely objective mimesis of the Real itself. There is "no way out" of the fantasy-reality we construct. But even in realizing this conundrum, Abbey writes: "[b]est to launch forth boldly, with or without lifejackets" (240). Or, as Lacan's maxim states: Do not cede your desire.

Even as he gives rein to his desire and pursues that "something" which drives him, Abbey regards the desert as "beyond the ability of man to wholly grasp or utilize" (240). It is "desolate and still and strange, unfamiliar and often grotesque in its forms and colors" (241). "There is something about the desert," he repeats, "that the human sensibility cannot assimilate, or has not so far been able to assimilate" (242). And after all his searching, his "futile but fascinating quest for the great, unimaginable treasure which the desert seems to promise," Abbey admits that "this quality of strangeness in the desert remains undiminished" (242). It always retains the ability to surprise and startle the person who has the "capacity to wonder" (177).

I wish to return briefly to the issue with which I began this chapter: namely Abbey's calculated effort to confound, provoke, and shock his readers. Abbey states that "if the book has

any virtues they cannot be distinguished from the faults; that there is a way of being wrong which is also sometimes necessarily right" (xxii). This "way of being right" grows out of those passages which surprise and startle us. They thwart our efforts at adequately symbolizing the narrator in the same way that the desert thwarts Abbey's efforts to understand it. Both the narrator and the desert he describes remain "strange, unfamiliar and often grotesque" (242). Abbey the narrator is as unpredictable and mysterious as the landscape in which he searches and wanders for that "something" which remains undiminished.

"Round and round, through and endless labyrinth of thought" (257). With this line Abbey describes the paradoxical search for the impossible. But Abbey's quest must be thought of not as a two-dimensional circle "[r]ound and round" the same object of desire, but as a three-dimensional spiral since desire adds a forward and a temporal vector to his drive forcing him into new challenges and experiences. He tells us how he oscillates between a search for "a treasure which has no name and has never been seen," and the conviction that "the desert has no heart, that it presents a riddle which has no answer, and that the riddle itself is an illusion created by some limitation or exaggeration of the displaced human consciousness" (242-3). He is alternately "rational, sensible and realistic" and "restive, irritable, brooding and dangerous as a wolf in a cage" (243). Abbey is skeptical and wary of his own mind's ability to create a world around his desire, but he is not satisfied by that world and holds out for a continually new relationship with the unknowable world "*out there*": "In answer to the original question, then, I find myself in the end returning to the beginning, and can only say, as I said in the first place: There is *something* about the desert" (243). To Abbey, that *something* is both sinister and wonderful, a "golden lure" (242), and always beyond his own imagining.

"We are deep in the wild now," Abbey writes in his account of his river trip with Ralph Newcomb. This thought leads him to consider the word "wilderness." He describes its meaning as a paradox: "It means something lost and something still present, something remote and at the same time intimate, something buried in our blood and nerves, something beyond us and without limit" (167). The word expresses Abbey's understanding of the Real: that which constitutes all and is forever inaccessible to our consciousness.

Abbey describes this *understanding* of the impossibility of our desire and the impossibility of closing the gap between our reality and the world itself as "love":

But the love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth, the earth which bore us and sustains us, the only home we shall ever know, the only paradise we ever need--if only we had the eyes to see. Original sin, the true original sin, is the blind destruction for the sake of greed of this natural paradise which lies all around us--if only we were worthy of it. (167)

Like Lopez, Abbey moves beyond the recognition of the dialectic of desire, of the "hunger for what is always beyond reach," to an ethic based on dignity. Love of wilderness, of that which is "beyond us," is more than desire. Abbey's "expression of loyalty to the earth" echoes Lopez's "expression of allegiance with the mystery of life" (Arctic Dreams 414). The mystery, the "quality of strangeness," fundamental to the earth itself, makes the land both dangerous and marvellous: this quality is the source of the land's dignity. According to both writers, it is incumbent upon us to retain a "capacity for wonder" and recognize and preserve the dignity of the earth, even as we struggle with the paradox of our desire.

CHAPTER FOUR

Annie Dillard: Waiting for Gifts and Terrors

Even more than Lopez's Arctic in Arctic Dreams or Abbey's desert in Desert Solitaire, Annie Dillard's Tinker Creek is turned into a strange and disturbing landscape at almost every turn of the page in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. When not disturbing, the landscape is dazzling. Either way it is new, unpredictable, or only fleetingly familiar to the text's narrator: "That something is everywhere and always amiss is part of the very stuff of creation" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 180). In the Lacanian terms I have been using, there is always a stain on our fantasies. Look awry and the world is uncanny.

The framework I've employed in the preceding two chapters--the uncanny, desire, mystery--fits well with Dillard's exploration of Tinker Creek. The notion that things are "always amiss" describes the uncanniness of the world made unfamiliar by the intrusion of the Real, of its unsymbolizable excess over our reality. Desire and fantasy are foregrounded in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek by such elements as Dillard's constant "stalking" of animals, microscopic to mammalian, and her notion of reality as a fragile and impermanent painted scroll shaking uncomfortably when the unpredictable occurs. There is always something which might rock this reality--a mysterious horror or delight--and force us to face the contingency of our fantasies and the unknowability of the world.

Dillard associates "stalking" and desire with the Christian tradition of the *via positiva*³: the way of understanding God through the contemplation of symbols. She associates another

³ For further discussion of the theological sources of the *via positiva* and the *via negativa* see Linda L. Smith 17-33.

kind of desire, an active "waiting," with the *via negativa*: the way of revelations and mysteries.

Based on these traditions, Dillard presents us with an imperative. She writes, "Stalk the gaps" (269). Seek out the new and strange in the gap between the familiar and the mysterious. Remain open and receptive to the gifts of the universe.

The Uncanny: things in their place and out

"Things are well in their place," writes Dillard, who goes on to describe picking up a brown cocoon, something she does frequently, and placing it in her pocket to take back to her house. When she sees a similar cocoon split slightly, she opens it further and discovers inside hundreds of tiny spiders "already alive, all squirming in a tangled orgy of legs" (51-2). She quickly empties her pocket now knowing what is in the cocoon. "Things out of place are ill," she continues, recounting the times she found a snake in a birdhouse and a carrion beetle trying to crawl out of a cigar box despite the pin staking it in place. She then wonders if she might see an opossum scurrying around a corner in her house or if she will find "on the back of the stove a sudden stew I never fixed, bubbling, with a deer leg sticking out" (52). Things are "well" when they conform to or even confirm our fantasies; things are "ill" when they do not. The unexpected animals render Dillard's fantasies uncanny. They are "strange bodies" and are as unexpected and disturbing as the "sudden stew" that might turn up in her own kitchen: the unfamiliar within the familiar.

Scenes in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek are constantly rendered uncanny by elements which disturb their "harmony" and reinscribe them with multiple meanings, often disturbing. The frog and waterbug episode which takes place in the first chapter is one of the most discussed passages

of the book⁴ and is a perfect example of Dillard's depiction of the uncanny. Scaring frogs as she walks along the edge of an island in Tinker Creek, Dillard comes upon one small, green frog which does not jump like the others. She describes coming within four feet of the frog when

he slowly crumpled and began to sag. The spirit vanished from his eyes as if snuffed. His skin emptied and drooped; his very skull seemed to collapse and settle like a kicked tent. He was shrinking before my eyes like a deflating football. I watched the taut, glistening skin on his shoulders ruck, and rumple, and fall. Soon, parts of his skin, formless as a pricked balloon, lay in floating folds like a bright scum on top of the water: it was a monstrous and terrifying thing. I gaped bewildered, appalled. (6)

Despite numerous similes ("kicked tent," "football"), Dillard is unable to make the experience comfortable or familiar. The skin remains "monstrous and terrifying." Even after she realizes that a giant water bug has sucked the insides out of the frog, she is unsettled: "I couldn't catch my breath" (6). The knowledge that was repressed from the scene, the horrifying facts of carnivorous predation, rush back, overwhelming Dillard (and her readers) with revulsion and a new perspective on Tinker Creek.

The position of this event at the beginning of her book allows it to function in a manner similar to Lopez's recounting in Arctic Dreams of the whalers of the *Cumbrian* and the right whale that "transfixed" them or to Abbey's description of the "sinister glamour" of quicksand or his "strange, stirring" encounter with pools of frogs after a flood (Desert Solitaire 125). Like

⁴ The passage was the subject of sustained debate on the ASLE discussion list under the heading "Dillard's Bug." The whole discussion is archived at the ASLE website (see bibliography).

these encounters, Dillard's frog episode introduces the reader to the uncanniness of the world, what Lopez calls its "fundamental strangeness," which always has the potential to disrupt the familiarity we construct. Dillard writes, "We don't know what's going on here" (8), and she uses the frog skin as a recurring motif in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek to remind us of the fact that the world is beyond our comprehension, always unfamiliar. We don't know for sure what is in that cocoon, that birdhouse, that cigar box. And, in knowing that one thing is "out of place," how comfortable can we be with the places in which we have put everything else?

In the chapter entitled "The Fixed," Dillard notes, "a scene that was in the back of my brain all afternoon, obscurely, is beginning to rise from night's lagoon" (59). As with most of us, with night, exhaustion, and sleep comes the return of that which we repress, those fears and desires which are usually hidden in our unconscious. The scene which rises in Dillard's mind is a memory from her childhood. A friend brought a Polyphemus moth cocoon to her school, and the warmth of the children's hands as they passed it around made the pupa begin to squirm and jump, at which point the teacher put it in a Mason jar. When it finally broke free of the cocoon, it did not have enough room to spread its wings, which hardened into "a single nightmare clump," a "monster in a Mason jar"(61). Dillard still remembers seeing the moth walking away in the school driveway, "dragging on" (61). The class had seen pictures of the beautiful Polyphemus moth to which the monstrous newly-hatched moth had little resemblance. When Dillard now works with cocoons, the memory of this disaster returns to render her fantasy of beautiful moths and butterflies uncanny. The encounters are tinged with horror at the potentially disastrous results and the monstrous creatures that might emerge.

Later in the book, Dillard describes one early summer day on Tinker Creek in which the

water in the creek was "an opaque pale green, like pulverized jade, still high and very fast, lightless, like no earthly water" (148). Like the "familiar chill" (Arctic Dreams 394) Lopez feels around the arctic pumping station or the "faintly malevolent" feel (Desert Solitaire 179) to Abbey's Escalante River, Tinker Creek has "an air of menace" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 148). The oddness of the water threatens the stability of Dillard's reality, allowing new meanings to arise from the quotidian:

A broken whiskey bottle by the log, the brown tip of a snake's tail disappearing between two rocks on a hill at my back, the rabbit the dog ["I've never seen before"] nearly caught, the rabies I knew was in this county, the bees who kept unaccountable fumbling at my forehead with their furred feet . . . (148)

Dillard is made uncomfortably aware of the threats and hazards that are all around her: whose whiskey was it? what if one of the poisonous snakes bites her? could the dog have rabies? what is disturbing the bees? The familiar is made unfamiliar.

Dillard follows the description of this disturbing day with an account of a flood that occurred the previous year. Once again, the familiar is made unfamiliar but on a much grander scale. Tinker Creek "looks like somebody else's creek that has usurped or eaten our creek and is roving frantically to escape, big and ugly, like a blacksnake caught in a kitchen drawer" (149). Dillard marvels at the fact that the land is so different and new, but now she also recognizes the enormity of the danger she and her neighbors face: "no one can help imagining himself washed overboard, and gauging his chance for survival" (151). Standing on the unsteady remains of a bridge she notes, "It's all I can do to stand. I feel dizzy, drawn, mauled. . . . All the familiar land looks as though it were not solid and real at all, but painted on a scroll like a backdrop, and that

scroll has been shaken, so the earth sways and the air roars" (151). Her reality is somewhat like that painted scroll which is now shaken loose by the strangeness of the landscape. The experience is similar to Lopez's anxiety when he considers the depth of ocean underneath the ice on which he works (Arctic Dreams 244) or to Abbey's "sense of dread in the primeval desert" when he considers the real dangers that surround him (Desert Solitaire 191). The land each author "knows" is suddenly no longer comfortable but dangerous and threatening, and strangely unfamiliar.

In Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Dillard demonstrates the paradox of her observation that things "are well in their place," and that things "out of place are ill." Without that painted "scroll," the stable, familiar world where things are "in their place," she would be in a constant state of ecstasy and terror. Her world would lack any regulation of the *jouissance* that is the Real. It would be constantly unfamiliar. Yet it is by organizing things "in their place," by limiting the world with a symbolic understanding of it, that the very excess which erupts in the midst of the familiar comes into being. The uncanniness with which Dillard is constantly confronted, the paradox of things in and out of place, is the paradox of stalking and waiting, of fantasy and mystery.

Desire: "seeing" in "the only world I know"

Dillard's fantasy-reality is constantly shattered by the intrusion of surplus knowledge, of the unsymbolizable Real. But this should come as no surprise since she is always seeking out, "stalking," the new and disturbing. In her first chapter, Dillard describes how she wakes "expectant, hoping to see a new thing" (2). She wakes and goes walking: "Like the bear who went over the mountain, I went out to see what I could see" (11). This seeking is "our original

intent, which is to explore the neighborhood, view the landscape, to discover at least *where* it is that we have been so startlingly set down, if we can't learn why. . . . I am an explorer, then, and I am also a stalker, or the instrument of the hunt itself" (12). Especially in the first half of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Dillard foregrounds the workings of desire and fantasy by describing her own methods of stalking and seeing, and the limits and instability of the world she creates for herself, as well as the necessity of creating that world to hold off madness.

Zižek describes fantasy as that which "designates the subject's 'impossible' relation to [*objet*] *a*, to the object-cause of its desire. . . . it is precisely the role of fantasy to give the coordinates of the subject's desire, to specify its object, to locate the position the subject assumes in it" (Looking 6). Fantasy stages a scenario in which we pursue an object that we believe will fulfill our longing, our lack. Each time we approach *objet a* and risk encountering its constructedness and its function as a substitute for the impossible Thing, unmediated access to the Real, fantasy works to integrate new experiences as new knowledge and to re-orient our desire towards a new object in an endless chain of substitutes.

Throughout Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Dillard seeks a "pearl of great price" which she describes as the "secret of seeing" (33). But, paradoxically, although this secret "may be found, it may not be sought" (33). Dillard's pearl is unmediated experience of the world. She desires such experience in a manner similar to Abbey, who longs to "merge" with the non-human and retain an individual consciousness as discussed in the previous chapter. But this pearl cannot be found with a gaze distorted by desire. Dillard suggests that "the mind's muddy river, this ceaseless flow of trivia and trash, cannot be dammed, and that trying to dam it is a waste of effort that might lead to madness" (32). As I discussed with reference to both Arctic Dreams and Desert Solitaire,

where the subject's reality is not maintained through a relationship with the social Other we indeed find madness: that "muddy river" becomes a psychotic universe (Žižek, Looking 81).

In the chapter entitled "Stalking," Dillard provides a wonderful example of the difficulty of "seeing" and the paradox of that which may be found but may not be sought. While out stalking the muskrats, frogs, and fish of Tinker Creek, she notes, "I am prying into secrets again, and taking my chances. I might see anything happen; I might see nothing but light on water" (184). She elaborates on this final point when describing her efforts to glimpse three bluegills:

The very act of trying to see fish makes them almost impossible to see. . . . If I face the sun along a bank I cannot see into the water; instead of fish I see water striders, the reflected undersides of leaves, bird's bellies, clouds and blue sky. So I cross to the opposite side and put the sun at my back. Then I can see into the water perfectly within the blue shadow made by my body; but as soon as that shadow looms across them, the fish vanish in a flurry of flashing tails. (185)

If we think, in Lacanian terms, of Dillard's desire to see the bluegills, this short passage is an immensely rich metaphor for the workings of desire.

Structurally, Dillard is the desiring subject seeking the object which will fulfill her desire. But the only thing (Thing) that will fill her lack is that impossible non-symbolic union with the other. Instead of facing this stunning, anxiety-provoking realization, the unconscious produces substitutes which take the place of the Thing. In the first instance, facing the sun, where Dillard looks for bluegills, she sees bugs and reflections of birds, leaves, and sky. The true object of her desire remains hidden under the surface of the water. Standing gazing into the water, she sees countless tantalizing substitutes for the true object she wishes to see. A reflection on the surface,

then, is *objet a*: "'objectively' nothing, though, viewed from a certain perspective, it assumes the shape of 'something'" (Žižek, Looking 12).

In an interview after the publication of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Dillard has called this manner of seeing the *via positiva* (Hammond 32). The term comes from the Christian mystical tradition and refers to the technique of approaching God through the contemplation of symbols, of "recognizing and experiencing God in nature" (Smith 17). Since an understanding of God and his creation is the aim of the *via positiva*, this manner of seeking is similar to the Lacanian understanding of desire: we seek understanding of the world by "reading" it like a text. We seek to close the gap that exists between us and the Real. We turn to the world and ceaselessly search knowledge "beyond us."

The first half of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is a study of the workings of desire. In the chapter "Seeing," Dillard describes her inability to see the hundreds of black birds roosting in an Osage orange tree before they fly away. She writes, "It's all a matter of keeping my eyes open. Nature is like one of those line drawings of a tree that are puzzles for children: Can you find hidden in the leaves a duck, a house, a boy, a bucket, a zebra, and a boot?" (17). But she goes on to explain that it is not so simple as "keeping my eyes open." She quotes Stewart Edward White who suggests that to see deer, "As soon as you can forget the naturally obvious and construct an artificial obvious, then you will see deer" (18). The "naturally obvious" seems to be a familiar, everyday understanding of a landscape whereas the "artificial obvious" is an attempt to see in that familiar landscape what is not usually noticed. It is an altering of one's perspective. Dillard describes how the lover and the knowledgeable, like a herpetologist, have an "artificial obvious" (18). Where the local looks disinterestedly and sees nothing, the herpetologist sees snakes

because he is looking from a perspective which gives shape to that "nothing" and makes it obvious like an outline of a duck in the child's puzzle.

"I just don't know what the lover knows," writes Dillard (18). But the lover's knowledge is constructed by desire. The lover sees "an object that *does not exist* for an objective gaze" (Žižek, Looking 12). The *objet a* of the lover's fantasies is unique and cannot be "seen" in the same manner by anyone else. *Objet a* is not seen at all without the symbolic register of language which intercedes and fills out our lack, provoking endless substitutes and meanings in the very place of lack and nonsense. Dillard is aware of the function of language in the workings of desire. "Seeing," she writes,

is of course very much a matter of verbalization. Unless I call my attention to what passes before my eyes, I simply won't see it. . . . If Tinker Mountain erupted, I'd be likely to notice. But if I want to notice the lesser cataclysms of valley life, I have to maintain in my head a running description of the present. It's not that I'm observant; it's just that I talk too much. Otherwise, especially in a strange place, I'll never know what's happening. (31-2)

Just as Lopez cannot "suspend" his desire to know "exactly how one is situated in the vastness" and "to fully comprehend the space a map renders and sets borders to" (Arctic Dreams 280), Dillard needs to create a context, a fantasy, so that she can "know what's happening" in a "strange place." And like Abbey, who argues that through language "comes knowing; we grasp an object, mentally, by giving it a name--hension, prehension, apprehension. And thus through language create a whole world, corresponding to the other world out there" (Desert Solitaire 257), Dillard also recognizes the need to order her world with language: "I had thought to live by the creek in

order to shape my life to its free flow. But I seem to have reached a point where I must draw the line. It looks as though the creek is not buoying me up but dragging me down" (176). This "line" between us and the Real Abbey calls a "veil of ideas" but also "mental smog" (Desert Solitaire 184). Dillard calls it both the "only world I know" but, elsewhere, "useless interior babble" (31).

Like Lopez and Abbey, Dillard acknowledges the limits of her ability to comprehend the world. She knows that she is imposing order where there is none. She tells us that she brings "human values to the creek" and in so doing saves herself from being "brutalized" (179). Being "brutalized" can be understood as both becoming as brutal as the rest of the universe, and as being cruelly dealt with by that universe. Those "human values," such as the value of an individual's life, give Dillard a perspective which allows her to separate herself from "creation" and see a world of order. She draws "a line" between her fantasy and the Real so that she has a means of regulating the terrifying, hungry, and fecund *jouissance* of the world of which she is both a part and apart from.

Dillard can regulate but she cannot control the Real or prevent it from breaking through and disturbing her fantasy. She cannot keep her own world from being suddenly rendered uncanny. At the end of her chapter on fecundity, she declares: "That something is everywhere and always amiss is part of the very stuff of creation" (180). Something we cannot predict or keep repressed is always there to render the scene uncanny and send us scrambling to make sense, to draw a new "line." Cover to cover, Pilgrim at Tinker Creek is filled with discoveries that startle Dillard and make the place she is trying to understand unfamiliar.

The book opens with an old tom cat covering her body in bloody paw prints: "The sign on

my body could have been an emblem or a stain" (2). The bloody "stain," that element which reintroduces surplus knowledge into the fantasy, hints at the horrors of the world-- death, carnivorous predation, struggle, etc.--which lie all around Dillard. She writes, "We wake, if we ever wake at all, to mystery" (2). We get the feeling, while reading Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, that Dillard's world could radically shift at any moment, leaving her dazzled, dizzy, or horrified.

Dillard gapes, reels, and suffers from nightmares and dizziness throughout the book as she struggles to accommodate new experiences into her understanding of the world. It is interesting to note that Žižek describes the experience of the analysis similarly in terms of dizziness and terror:

In his everyday attitude, the subject refers to the objects of his *Umwelt*, of the world that surrounds him, as to some given positivity; psychoanalysis brings about a dizzy experience of how this given positivity exists and retains its consistency only in so far as somewhere else . . . some fundamental non-knowledge insists--it brings about the terrifying experience that if we come to know too much, we may lose our very being. (Žižek, Sublime 68)

The analysand, as she comes to realize that her understanding of the world is contingent and arbitrary, experiences a "dissolving" of her ontological consistency and is terrified at the potential loss of her "very being." As she studies the world around her more intently, Dillard comes to believe that the "sea is a cup of death and the land is a stained alter stone," and declares: "We wake in terror, eat in hunger, sleep with a mouthful of blood" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 174-5). In a sense she comes to "know too much" and her world loses its consistency; she must "part ways" with it. And although she writes, "I range wild-eyed, flying over fields and plundering the

woods, no longer quite fit for company" (266), she is forced to "draw the line," reflect on her experience, and give some kind of consistency to her world, if only briefly. Despite the chaos of the Real that disturbs her fantasy, Dillard admits, "I seek a reduction" (251). Such a reduction keeps her from madness. In the face of the Real, she tries to "learn the neighborhood" (128), "to see it all, to understand it" (128), "to have things as multiply and intricately as possible present in [her] mind" (137). She does not "cede her desire" but persists in it despite the terrible knowledge of its impossibility.

No matter where Dillard draws her line, however, the world she projects is not "fixed." This is why she is constantly thrown into a state of dizziness. The world she creates through her "verbalization" is rocked by the excess of the Real which spills over the line and unsettles her creation, her reality. But there is another kind of "fixed" in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek: the terrifying, unwavering drive of the male praying mantis copulating without his head; the Polyphemus moth of Dillard's childhood, "dragging on" despite its fused wings; the moth caterpillars which "mindlessly" travel the circular lip of a vase for seven days. Žižek gives an example of this kind of horrifying drive from popular culture: "The horror of [the cyborg in *The Terminator*] consists precisely in the fact that it functions as a programmed automaton who, even when all that remains of him is a metallic, legless skeleton, persists in his demand and pursues his victim with no trace of compromise or hesitation. The terminator is the embodiment of the drive, devoid of desire" (Looking 22). Where desire moves along a chain of substitutes, drive is "fixed" on one object, and we are profoundly disturbed by the seeming inability of the animal, or the cyborg, to "reason" its way out:

The fixed is the world without fire--dead flint, dead tinder, and nowhere a spark.

It is motion without direction, force without power, the aimless procession of caterpillars round the rim of a vase, and I hate it because at any moment I myself might step to that charmed and glistening thread. (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 67-8)

To desire is to risk having the painted scroll of reality torn free as the Real earth "sways," to pursue endlessly changing substitutes for the lost Thing, to approach *objet a* and declare "this is not *that*," rejecting the object of desire as unfulfilling. As paradoxical and impossible as this desire is, it has the "direction" and "aim" which Dillard finds horrifyingly lacking in the "fixed." It is through desire that we grow and change as individuals, that we learn more about the world. And, as Dillard cautions, suspension of desire risks madness.

Mystery: openness and the *via negativa*

Describing her efforts at stalking in the summer, Dillard notes that the creatures she seeks "have several senses and free will; it becomes apparent that they do not wish to be seen" (184). She therefore adopts the two methods of stalking: the *via positiva*, where Dillard forges ahead "doggedly" seeking creatures; and the *via negativa*: "I take my stand on a bridge and wait, emptied. I put myself in the way of the creature's passage" (184). This second way is symbolized by her second attempt to see the bluegills in Tinker Creek: "So I cross to the opposite side and put the sun at my back. Then I can see into the water perfectly within the blue shadow made by my body" (185). But even though she no longer sees the reflections on the surface of the creek, the *objet a*, the fish themselves "vanish in a flurry of flashing tails" (185). Metaphorically, the fish are the absolute, unmediated knowledge of the Real, *jouissance*, and, as such, they are unsymbolizable. The subject adopts a kind of open waiting for anything to happen, the *via negativa*. The fish might pass within her shadow, or, as Dillard writes: "I might

see a monstrous carp heave out of the water . . . , or I might see a trout emerge in a riffle . . . , or I might see only a flash of back parts fleeing" (186).

The seeker who proceeds by the *via negativa* assumes that there are mysteries that cannot be sought or fully fathomed. Dillard suggests that such mysteries are experienced in the *via negativa* as a kind of "gift." This means of experiencing the world accords well with Barry Lopez's call "to approach [the land] with an uncalculating mind, with an attitude of regard" (Arctic Dreams 228). By the *via negativa*, Dillard recognizes the fundamental mysteriousness of the world as an inexhaustible beauty and horror that will continually startle if she remains open and receptive.

In the Christian mystical tradition, the *via negativa* is a path of revelation which assumes that God cannot be comprehended by the human mind (Smith 17). The "secret of seeing," Dillard's "pearl of great price," is found only in such revelation since desire, the mind's "muddy river," is always present in any direct form of seeking. Dillard writes: "The literature of illumination reveals this above all: although it comes to those who wait for it, it is always, even to the most practiced and adept, a gift and a total surprise" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 33). "It" is direct, unsymbolized experience of the Real, the unexpected intrusion of the Real into one's fantasy. The religious roots of Dillard's *via negativa* are echoed by Lopez in Arctic Dreams when he describes our obligation to regard the mysteriousness of the land "as a kind of wisdom to be experienced, not questioned. And to be alert for its openings, for that moment when *something sacred reveals itself within the mundane*" (228, my emphasis). It is in "that moment" when we are alert and receptive that the experience of the mysterious might come as a "gift."

"There are lots of things to see, unwrapped gifts and free surprises," Dillard writes. She

describes the flight of the hundreds of blackbirds from the Osage orange tree as a "gift": "These appearances catch at my throat; they are the free gifts, the bright coppers at the roots of trees" (16). After reading of a young girl who, having her cataracts removed, saw a "tree with the lights in it" in a garden, Dillard sets out to see the same. She admits, however, "I can't go out and try to see this way. I'll fail, I'll go mad" (32). She finally sees the "tree with the lights in it" when she is "thinking of nothing at all" (33). Dillard tells us that she has seen it only rarely since: "The vision comes and goes, mostly goes, but I live for it, for the moment when the mountains open and a new light roars in space through the crack, and the mountains slam" (34).

Unlike Dillard, Abbey does not describe many delightful episodes which "startle the senses." He never divines any "cosmic intuitions." He describes mostly the frightening aspect of the unfamiliar. At Rainbow Bridge he feels that he understands "for a moment the dread which many feel in the presence of the primeval desert, the unconscious fear which compels them to tame, alter or destroy what they cannot understand, to reduce the wild and prehuman to human dimensions" (Desert Solitaire 191). A vision much more similar to Dillard's "new light" roaring in comes to Lopez at Axel Heiberg Island:

In the walls of Axel Heiberg I found what I had known of mountains as a child; that from them came a knowledge that was received, for which there were no words, only, vaguely, prayers. . . . In the stillness of Axel Heiberg I felt for the first time the edges of an unentered landscape. (Arctic Dreams 404)

Despite the differences in describing his or her experiences, each of the three authors describes a similar kind of receptiveness, a willingness to wait and listen, passive and alert, rather than to seek and describe. Each author is an object acted upon by the world. Visions come to each of

them as revelations.

Dillard writes that the kind of seeing that does not involve desire "involves a kind of letting go. When I see this way I sway transfixed and emptied" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 31). Lopez too, at the moment of a similar reverie, admits, "I lost for long moments my sense of time and purpose as a human being" (Arctic Dreams 404). In such a state or with such an attitude, Dillard's expectations are open. Writing about the weather, she notes that "what we think . . . is really all a matter of statistical probabilities; at any given point, anything might happen" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 75). When Tinker Creek floods and the landscape is newly unfamiliar, Dillard writes, "I expect to see anything at all," and this leads her to the startling statement that "[t]he whole world is in flood, the land as well as the water" (152). This observation echoes her earlier claim that "everywhere I look I see fire; that which isn't flint is tinder, and the whole world sparks and flames" (9). Again I am reminded of Lopez's words in Arctic Dreams describing landscapes: "They are crucibles of mystery, precisely like the smaller ones they contain--the arctic fox, the dwarf birch, the pi-meson; and the larger ones that contain them, side by side with such seemingly immutable objects as the Horsehead Nebula in Orion" (412). Both writers are struck by the mutability and flux of the world beyond the order and meaning imposed by desire.

The dazzling "gifts" of the world which Dillard "sees" obliquely are only one part of the surprises that startle her. As I highlighted when discussing the uncanny in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek earlier, Dillard is frequently struck by horror and fear in the face of unfathomable fecundity and death. The beautiful and the horrific are "twin fiords cutting into the granite cliffs of mystery" (242). It is especially when she reflects on the number of parasitic species that live with us--ten percent of animal species--that Dillard sees herself as a passive object in a wild

world:

I am not washed and beautiful, in control of a shining world in which everything fits, but instead am wandering awed about on a splintered wreck I've come to care for, whose gnawed creatures breathe a delicate air, whose bloodied and scarred creatures are my dearest companions, and whose beauty beats and shines not in its imperfections but overwhelmingly in spite of them, under the wind-rent clouds, upstream and down. (242)

"I am not . . . in control," she states just as she noted earlier in the book that "[w]e don't know what's going on here" (8). The passage above emphasises the "bloodied and scarred creatures" who, like us, live in a world where the Other is inscrutable but has designs on them. No one is in control. Or, from the perspective of the *via negativa*, if anything is in control, it is unquestionably beyond our language, and thus our minds, to comprehend. Even the plant world is beyond adequate symbolization: "All the theories the botanists have devised to explain the functions of various leaf shapes tumble under an avalanche of inconsistencies. They simply don't know, can't imagine" (132).

There is an interesting intersection of theology and Lacanian theory in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. Whether marvelling at the intricacy and complexity of creation or the mindless fecundity and violence of it, Dillard portrays God, usually *Deus Absconditus* (7), as inscrutable:

The universe was not made in jest but in solemn incomprehensible earnest. By a power that is unfathomably secret, and holy, and fleet. There is nothing to be done about it, but ignore it or see. (270)

Like Moses, we might see God's "back parts," but even then it is a gift for which we must wait

and cannot seek. So Dillard waits: "on bridges; I wait, struck, on forest paths and the meadow's fringes, hilltops and banksides, day in and day out" (251). Revelations and visions come only to those who wait; they cannot be sought.

This is a good description of the Lacanian Real⁵. The Real is theorized as that inscrutable register which, though it cannot be adequately symbolized, is the positive condition of our reality. It is the register of *jouissance*, overstimulation outside symbolization and meaning. Jouissance cannot be "sought" since desire posits its object beforehand, giving meaning and logic to it. It is in the unexpected moments that the Real erupts and shatters our fantasies: within the familiar, in dreams, in analysis. Waiting for the experience of the Real, in the manner that Dillard waits for revelation, is a paradox since there can be no anticipation. Can it be said that we "wait" for dreams or nightmares?

Dillard waits for "gifts" such as the "tree with the lights in it," but, having no control over the eruption of the Real, she often experiences the "gifts" as disturbing revelations and nightmares. The frog and waterbug episode which I discussed previously as an example of the uncanny is an example of this eruption. Dillard is "appalled" by what she witnesses. It disturbs her very understanding of the creek and affects subsequent observations. During much of the second half of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, Dillard is disgusted by almost all of her discoveries. She does not anticipate the "terrible pressure" of fecundity:

I don't know what it is about fecundity that so appalls. I suppose it is the teeming evidence that birth and growth, which we value, are ubiquitous and blind, that life

⁵ For an detailed description of the Lacanian Real, see Slavoj Žižek's The Sublime Object of Ideology, 169-73.

itself is so astonishingly cheap, that nature is as careless as it is bountiful, and that with extravagance goes a crushing waste that will one day include our own cheap lives. . . . Every glistening egg is a memento mori. (160)

Fecundity erupts in the midst of Dillard's "values" and disturbs the world she understands. It introduces the surplus knowledge of the "eggy animal world" (161) that she cannot adequately understand and thereby symbolize.

She is also startled by the brutal violence of the natural world. "Nature" seems "diametrically opposed" to her values, such as the value of the individual. The world Dillard has constructed is radically inconsistent with her new knowledge. She is shaken by the idea that evolution "loves death more than it loves you or me" (176). She writes,

Is human culture with its values my only real home after all? . . . This direction of thought brings me abruptly to a fork in the road where I stand unwilling to go on, for both ways lead to madness.

Either this world, my mother, is a monster⁶, or I myself am a freak. . . . the universe that suckled us is a monster that does not care if we live or die. (176-7)

The universe is amoral and "running on chance and death"; we are moral, "free and seeing," and trying to outwit a world which kills indiscriminately. Or, alternatively, "creation itself is blamelessly, benevolently askew by its very free nature, and . . . it is human feeling that is freakishly amiss" (178). Dillard favours the second alternative, arguing that "the world's amorality does not make it a monster," and that her fellow human beings "appear more and more

⁶ For further discussion of the link between "mother," "monster," and the excess of the Real, see Mary Russo's The Female Grotesque (1994).

freakish" as she spends more time at the creek (178-9).

Dillard asks, "Must I then part ways with the only world I know?" (176). The question, she tells us, is "old, old mystery, as old as man, but forever fresh, and *completely unanswerable*" (179, my emphasis). The waste does not make the world a monster, but in its frightening mysteriousness lies *jouissance*, the exhilarating, terrifying, and unbearable overstimulation by the Real both beyond and supporting our "reality." Not to regulate this *jouissance* is, as Dillard predicts, a descent into "madness." Such regulation is, perhaps, the "freakish" human feeling and values of the second option where humans are perceived as being out of sync with the rest of the universe, but those values, an integral part of the symbolic order, are the "forced yes" of subjectivity. With language and social relations come values, contested values to be sure, but modes of conduct for which Dillard can find no discernible parallel in the natural world.

But it is not only in the natural world that Dillard experiences terrifying *jouissance*. The chapter entitled "Fecundity" opens with a description of a nightmare she experiences:

I wakened myself last night with my own shouting. It must have been that terrible yellow plant I saw pushing though the flood-damp soil near the log by Tinker Creek, the plant as fleshy and featureless as a slug, that erupted through the floor of my brain as I slept, and burgeoned into the dream of fecundity that woke me up. (159)

The dream itself is of two luna moths mating "with a horrible animal vigor" that is "the perfect picture of utter spirituality and utter degradation" (159-60). The moth eggs then hatch and cover her bed "three feet deep" in fish "swimming and oozing about in the glistening, transparent slime" (160). Dillard the dreamer watches it all because she "wanted in on a secret": "it was

understood in the dream that the bed full of fish was my own fault, that if I had turned away from the mating moths, the hatching of the eggs wouldn't have happened, or at least would have happened in secret, elsewhere" (160). Dillard pays the price for coming to "know too much" and confronts, in the dream, the impossibility of her desire for understanding and for unmediated knowledge of the world. The point at which she wakes is just prior to the next logical step in the sequence: being eaten by the fish, losing her very self in becoming an object for the oozing Other.

Like the memory of the deformed Polyphemus moth which haunts her cocoon hunts, Dillard's insights into the "rank fecundity" of the animal world cannot be completely or satisfyingly repressed. There are cracks in the symbolic understanding of science. Dillard, in discussing our "original intent" to "explore the neighborhood," admits that such exploration risks "searing, exhausting nightmares that plunder rest" along with the "pleasure" of the days (12). It is not simply an aversion to the "eggy animal world" that troubles Dillard but rather the knowledge of her place in that world as an animal and as prey, and of the impossibility of her desire to understand that world. This impossible desire is similar to Abbey's desire to "merge with the non-human" and retain an individual consciousness. Abbey too has nightmares in which he faces the Real of his desire and its utter impossibility: the unpredictable violence and dangers of the desert return in the night to disturb his sleep. And although Lopez does not discuss any nightmares he had during his travels in the Arctic, his anxieties stem from a similar return of the repressed as Abbey and Dillard: the *jouissance* of an unpredictable, incomprehensible, violent, and dangerous Real world.

Lopez also describes a similar "distress" among field biologists, but there is a closer

parallel to Dillard's nightmare in his account of fear among arctic native peoples. In a sense, these people "know too much" to be altogether comfortable even in their familiar surroundings:

When I have thought about the ways in which they differ from people in my own culture, I have realized they are more afraid than we are. On a day-to-day basis, they have more fear. Not of being dumped into cold water from an umiak, not a debilitating fear. They are afraid because they accept fully what is violent and tragic in nature. It is a fear tied to their knowledge that sudden cataclysmic events are as much a part of life, of really living, as are the moments when one pauses to look at something quite beautiful. (Arctic Dreams 201).

That which disturbs the native people of the Arctic, and similarly that which disturbs Dillard, is "tied to their knowledge." Dillard has investigated and searched her surroundings enough to "know" that they are unknowable. She describes nature as a "fan dancer" who will not give up her last fan: "it will never quit her grip. She comes that way; the fan is attached" (203). Nature's mysteries are fundamental. Even in the first chapter of the book, Dillard lists the mysteries that cannot be understood:

The creeks--Tinker and Carver's--are an active mystery, fresh every minute.

Theirs is the mystery of the continuous creation and all that providence implies: the uncertainty of vision, the horror of the fixed, the dissolution of the present, the intricacy of beauty, the pressure of fecundity, the elusiveness of the free, and the flawed nature of perfection. (2-3)

This is Lopez's "fundamental strangeness" of the land, the "other world" Abbey describes as "beyond us." So it is with a mixture of fear and wonder that Dillard waits for the "pearl of great

price," and with a degree of courage. What she might find *without seeking*--a "tree with the lights in it" or an "sudden stew I never fixed, bubbling, with a deer leg sticking out" (52)--has the potential to force her to "part ways" with the "only world" she knows.

Ethic: "stalk the gaps" and wait

Dillard describes in great detail her attempts to stalk animals, especially fish and muskrats. It is with the latter that she has the most success. One time she creeps within ten feet of a feeding muskrat. Dillard writes, "Since I had seen just about everything I was ever going to see, I continued approaching just to see when he would break. To my utter bafflement he never broke. I broke first" (199). The encounter reminds me of the similar encounter in Desert Solitaire where Abbey lies on the ground in the path of two snakes but scrambles out of their way just as they approach. If he had been more capable of trust, he suggests, he "might have learned something new or some truth so very old we have all forgotten it" (Desert Solitaire 21). Just what is it that Dillard seeks when she stalks the muskrats? When she offers a "convivial greeting" to one, it becomes "terrified" and disappears: "The entire event was most impressive, and illustrates the relative power in nature of the word and the sneak" (200). What is it she wishes to discuss when she cries out to a horde of grasshoppers: "Wait! Where did you go? Does not any one of you, with your eighteen mouthparts, wish to have a word with me here in the Lucas meadow?" (210). Or when she suggests pinning one down until it calls her name (220)? Just as Abbey attempts to communicate with animals, Dillard calls out in jest and mocks the emptiness of language. But she too seeks to understand the world of animals, their perspectives. She wants "in on a secret" (160). But "our very self-consciousness," she notes, "is also the one thing that divides us from our fellow creatures" (79). Dillard envies how animals live "in the

present" (81) and laments that when we do experience the world in this manner, we are aware of it only afterwards. She desires the *jouissance* of living in the present and, aware of its fleetingness, stalks creatures for insight.

In the preceding chapters I discussed the way in which Lopez and Abbey both resist symbolic and imaginary identifications with the non-human and instead try to foster a sense of respect for the particular and unknowable in the Other. That particularity is the foundation for their concept of dignity. In *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, however, Dillard does engage in both symbolic and imaginary identifications with the non-human.

Dillard's attempts to imagine the mental life of animals such as muskrats living "in the present" serve as examples of imaginary identification. Such identification is based on one's own understanding and experience, not on what Žižek calls the Other's "particular absolute" (*Looking* 156). It is egocentric. Dillard also engages in symbolic identifications. A grasshopper which lands on her window is "hideous" and alien to her until she sees it breathe. She grows "sympathetic": "Yeah, I said, puff puff, isn't it?" (65). The rotifers she finds in a drop of pond-water "are real creatures with real organs leading real lives, one by one. . . . If I have life, sense, energy, will, so does a rotifer" (121). After seeing red blood cells whipping through the capillaries of a goldfish's tail, Dillard notes, "Those red blood cells are coursing through Ellery's tail [her pet goldfish's] now, too, in just that way, and through his mouth and eyes as well, and through mine" (125). But these symbolic identifications cannot form the basis for dignity because they also forsake the "particular absolute" in favour of a "universal-symbolic feature" (Žižek, *Looking* 156) which places the individual in a shared "symbolic community." Symbolic identification, based on knowledge, imposes limits on the Other.

Both symbolic and imaginary identifications are a function of the ego, and, although they cannot form the basis for conferring dignity on the Other, they are essential to participation in the social. And despite what at first seems like a major difference between Dillard's identifications with the non-human and the resistance to such identifications by Lopez and Abbey, Dillard does point to a fundamental mysteriousness in animals. For example, Dillard sits down on a cliff within four feet of a copperhead snake. She decides to outwait it and, as she studies it, a mosquito flies from her ankle to the snake and sucks its blood for a few minutes. Immediately Dillard moves towards symbolic identification with the snake which is a fellow "nibbled" creature. She calls the category that contains them both "we the living" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 227). But there is something about the snake which she does not understand or share: "Yes it knew I was there. There was something about its eyes, some alien alertness . . . what on earth must it be like to have scales on your face?" (223). The snake, with its "unfathomable face," is alien despite Dillard's broad knowledge of its biology. It remains a mystery. Reading about South African honey ants, Dillard considers the life of those in the colony that never leave the nest and act as "storage vessels" for the rest: "those ants are as present to me as if they hung from my kitchen ceiling, or down the vaults of my skull, pulsing live jars, engorged vats, teats, with an eyed animal at the head thinking--what?" (136). The question remains unanswered for even Dillard cannot imagine or identify with an existence so alien. Like the caterpillars driven to circle the flower pot forever, the ants foreground the unknowability the Other's *umwelt*.

It is in her waiting and that Dillard recognizes the dignity of the muskrat, the grasshoppers, her "old yard breathing alone in the dark" (241). Muskrats, she notes, "have a nice dignity, and prefer to have nothing to do with me, not even as simple object of my vision" (192).

When she stalks an oblivious muskrat for forty minutes, coming so close that her foot is six inches from his back, the close approach makes her uneasy: "it was also the ultimate in human intrusion, the limit beyond which I am certain I cannot go" (194). It is an encounter with the Other in its "moment of *jouissance*": "This encounter with the real is always traumatic; there is something at least minimally obscene about it; I cannot simply integrate it into my universe, there is always a gulf separating me from it" (Žižek, Plague 49).

It is this sense of dignity for the Other's "particular absolute"--the particular way "he organizes his universe of meaning" (Žižek, Looking 156)--that Dillard feels is violated when she stalks muskrats with other people. She realizes that the way in which she "alters her whole being for a muskrat" is so particular and personal that it seems obscene to others. The presence of the others robs her of her dignity just as she robs the muskrat of his. For Dillard, as with Lopez and Abbey, dignity lies not in what she "knows" or imagines about the Other, but in what is unknowable and particular to that Other: its "universe of meaning."

Dillard recognizes a limit to "knowing" the world. As she writes, "knowledge does not vanquish mystery, or obscure its distant lights" (241). But Dillard does not suggest we abandon the search for knowledge of the world. "[O]ur original intent," she writes, ". . . is to explore the neighborhood, view the landscape, to discover at least *where* it is that we have been so startlingly set down, if we can't learn why" (12). We must desire, seek, stalk, see, and confront. We must search out experiences which will force us to part with the world we know and form new understandings, new fantasies, and new symbolic constructs. In stalking muskrats, Dillard learns that she "cannot outwait a muskrat who knows I am there. The most I can do is get "there" quietly . . . and wait until it emerges. . . . You must just have to be there, I thought" (191). In

fact, Dillard makes a kind of maxim out of this seeking and waiting: "beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will or sense them. *The least we can do is try to be there*" (8, my emphasis). The "beauty and grace" she describes are those "gifts" of the world that surprise her and shatter her preconceptions, the "tree with the lights in it" or the frog sucked empty by a waterbug. "Being there" does not mean simply going to a new place, but being in a place with a certain attitude: "What I aim to do is not so much learn the names of the shreds of creation that flourish in this valley, but to keep myself open to their meanings, which is to try to impress myself at all times with the fullest possible force of their very reality" (137). Dillard seeks out the shreds of creation in her valley but in their particularity, "their very reality"; she is sensitive to difference rather than encyclopedic correspondence. She is, as Lopez describes it, "alert" for the openings in the fabric of her reality, "for that moment when something sacred reveals itself within the mundane" (Arctic Dreams 228). She waits for the "gifts" of the world in the same way she waits for muskrats: "alone and alert, but stilled in a special way, waiting and watching for a change in the water. . . . For when muskrats don't show, something else does" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 186-7). She desires knowledge, seeks with alertness and openness, and is always surprised by the world: "Come on, I say to the creek, surprise me; and it does with each new drop" (266).

The creek, like so many other things in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, surprises Dillard. Events overwhelm her. Visions exhilarate and disgust her. She is an object in her text almost as often as she is the subject. In the chapter "Nightwatch," Dillard imagines standing in a swarm of locusts:

I cannot ask for more than to be so wholly acted upon, flown at, and lighted on in throngs, probed, knocked, even bitten. A little blood from the wrists and throat is

the price I would willingly pay for that pressure of clacking weight on my shoulders, for the scent of deserts, groundfire in my ears--for being so in the clustering thick of things, rapt and enwrapped in the rising and falling real world.

(221)

Dillard describes herself as being on occasion "as purely sensitive and mute as a photographic plate" (198) and tells us, "I rise when I receive, like grass" (221). Dillard comes to her understanding of her world by waiting for "gifts" and surprises and by being acted upon and impressed. She waits "alone and alert, but stilled in a special way" and with passivity. Instead of acting out the "narcissistic pretensions" (Žižek, Looking 64) of knowing or controlling the world, Dillard sees herself as a "passive element" (64) dazzled by her own neighborhood. Turning a quotation from the conqueror Julius Caesar on its head, she writes, "I've been there, seen it, been done by it" (241).

In recognizing that she is "done by" the world, that she is an object in the worlds of other animals, Dillard assumes the Lacanian "ethical attitude" which Žižek describes a "unreserved acceptance of the death drive" (Žižek, Looking 63). Writing about the Peter Brooks version of Bizet's *Carmen*, Žižek calls Carmen an "*ethical figure*":

When she finally becomes an object *for herself also*, i.e., when she realizes that she is just a passive element in the interplay of libidinal forces, she "subjectifies" herself, she becomes a "subject." From the Lacanian perspective, "subjectification" is thus strictly correlative to experiencing oneself as an object, a "helpless victim": it is the name for the gaze by means of which we confront the utter nullity of our narcissistic pretensions. (64)

It is in this way that Dillard become an ethical figure. Accepting that she is "wholly acted upon" and not "in control of a shining world" (242), Dillard becomes an object "for herself also" and thereby comes to recognize the contingency of her own reality. Her stance of waiting "alone and alert" for the world to act upon her is a radically ethical attitude which forsakes the fantasy of a closed, finite reality and accepts the mysteriousness of the Real. It is with courage that Dillard asks the creek to surprise her, for she has no idea and no control over what may surface, what may delight, scare, or scar her.

But we must remember that other Lacanian maxim, "do not cede your desire." We must not stop desiring despite its impossibility and despite the endless chain of objects which we misrecognize as the things that will fill our lack. We must pursue our desires or else we forsake the chance to encounter the unknown, to experience the world as always new:

That the world is old and frayed is no surprise; that the world could ever become new and whole beyond uncertainty was, and is, such a surprise that I find myself referring all subsequent kinds of knowledge to it. . . . the new is always present with the old, however hidden. The tree with the lights in it does not go out; that light shines on an old world, now feebly, now bright. (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 241-2)

The need to persist in our desires and the complementary need to be remain open to mystery is expressed in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek as an imperative. Dillard writes of "gaps," those cracks in our reality which we try to suture over to maintain stability:

they are the fissures between mountains and cells the wind lances through, the icy narrowing fiords splitting the cliffs of mystery. *Go up into the gaps. If you can*

find them; they shrink and vanish too. *Stalk* the gaps. *Squeak* into a gap in the soil [like a maple seed], *turn*, and *unlock*--more than a maple--a universe. (269, italics mine)

Dillard implores us to "stalk the gaps," Lopez asks us to approach the land "with an uncalculating mind, with an attitude of regard," and Abbey calls for us to "launch forth boldly" with a "capacity for wonder" and a "loyalty to the earth." Dillard, in a similar manner to Lopez and Abbey, impels us to move forward, alert and receptive to the "particular absolute" of the Other which will always threaten our fantasies.

In one of her most powerful descriptions of "stalking the gaps," Dillard compares herself to Moses who waited "still in a clift of the rock, and saw the back parts of God" (204). She writes, "You have to stalk everything"(204): those "back parts of God," the "spirit," the gifts from the universe of "beauty and grace." You can "wait forgetful" or you can "pursue," but the revelations of the Real cannot be predicted or controlled. You may or may not be allowed into the Promised Land:

I sit on a bridge as on Pisgah or Sinai, and I am both waiting becalmed in a clift of the rock and banging with all my will, calling like a child beating on a door: Come on out! . . . I know you're there.

And then occasionally the mountains part. The tree with the lights in it appears, the mockingbird falls, and time unfurls across space like an oriflamme. Now we rejoice. The news, after all, is not that muskrats are wary, but that they can be seen. (205)

Just as Lopez approaches the land with *ilira*, and Abbey with wonder, loyalty, and fear, Dillard

stalks by waiting with fear and awe for "gifts" given freely by a world always new.

CHAPTER FIVE

Nature Writing, Love, Affinity, and Democracy

Love: "aptly called wild"

At a recent conference, Barry Lopez told an audience that he was returning with renewed interest to words he had written more than a decade ago in Arctic Dreams: "Whether intelligence, in other words, is love" (250). He concluded that it was love after all. In Brave Souls: Writers and Artists Wrestle With God, Love, Death, & Things That Matter, Douglas Todd writes,

These days [Lopez] is reflecting hard on the meaning of love. He thinks about it like a scholastic monk from an indeterminate religion. Love seems to offer the link that could tie together his ever-evolving, Earth-revering worldview. He defines God as "the fullest expression of the mystery we call love."

Asked about the planet's future, he answers that it is threatened because, "we're living on a continent where we are obsessed with being in power, rather than being in love." (Todd 200-1)

In Arctic Dreams, love is synonymous with an "attitude of regard," "enlightened respect," and *ilira*. So when, on that first page of Arctic Dreams, Lopez bows to a horned lark, and, in the concluding pages, he bows a bow "of allegiance with the mystery of life," the bow is a gesture of love.

In Looking Awry, Slavoj Žižek uses the question "Why do you love me?" to explore Lacan's "master signifier": "a signifier that does not denote some positive property of the object but establishes . . . a new intersubjective relation between speaker and hearer" (103). The master signifier then always refers to the same object "even if all properties contained in its meaning

prove false" (103). Concerning the question "Why do you love me?" Žižek writes,

In love proper, this question is, of course, unanswerable . . . i.e., the only appropriate answer is "Because there is something in you more than yourself, some indefinite X that attracts me, but that cannot be pinned down to any positive quality." In other words, if we answer it with a catalogue of positive properties ("I love you because of the shape of your breasts, because of the way you smile"), this is at best a mocking imitation of love proper. (103)

Žižek is being somewhat facetious in his discussion of love, but there is a point of intersection with Lopez's thoughts on love. To claim knowledge of all the reasons why a lover holds a spell over us is to assert control. In "love proper," there is a respect for the loved one and a realization that what draws the lover to the loved is a mystery; it is unknowable. Lopez's "allegiance with the mystery of life" is an acknowledgement that there is something "in the world more than the world itself" which "cannot be pinned down to any positive quality." The signifiers "world," "lark," or "Arctic" cannot be reduced to a catalogue of positive qualities: "We name everything. Then we fold the charts and the catalogs, as if, except for a stray fact or two, we were done with a competent description. But the land is not a painting; the image cannot be completed this way" (Arctic Dreams 172). To recognize the excess which can never be accommodated in our maps, to willfully face such anxiety, is to show respect. It is to love.

Ecofeminist philosopher Karen J. Warren echoes the call for such an attitude in her essay "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism." Warren analyses a rock climbing narrative and suggests that in the narrative "what counts as a proper ethical attitude towards mountains and rocks is an attitude of respect and care . . . not one of domination and conquest" (Warren

"Power," 28). To exemplify this "ethical attitude" further, Warren quotes feminist philosopher Marilyn Frye:

The loving eye is a contrary of the arrogant eye.

The loving eye knows the independence of the other. It is the eye of a seer who knows that nature is indifferent. It is the eye of one who knows that to know the seen, one must consult something other than one's own will and interests and fears and imagination. One must look at the thing. One must look and listen and check and question.

The loving eye is one that pays a certain sort of attention. [. . .]

The loving eye does not make the object of perception into something edible, does not try to assimilate it, does not reduce it to the size of the seer's desire, fear and imagination, and hence does not have to simplify. It knows the complexity of the other as something which will forever present new things to be known. (qtd in Warren, "Power" 75)

Frye's "loving eye" is a startlingly precise description of the ethic found in Arctic Dreams, Desert Solitaire, and Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. All three of the authors on which I have focused state in their own way two central characteristics of the "loving eye": first, that we must "look at the thing," and second, that we must recognize that it "will forever present new things to be known." It has been my argument that for all three authors, "loving perception" corresponds with the psychoanalytic maxim "do not cede your desire," and its supplement "respect as much as possible the other's 'particular absolute,' the way he organizes his universe of meaning in a way absolutely particular to him" (Žižek, Looking 156). To love is to desire, approach, learn, look and yet

respect mystery, the unknowable, the wild, the new.

For Lopez, the "loving eye" is the "love" to which he is returning these days. Abbey's writing also argues for Frye's "loving eye." He encourages us to "launch forth boldly" while retaining a "capacity for wonder." In Desert Solitaire, he describes his relationship with two gopher snakes in terms of "[s]ympathy, mutual aid, symbiosis, continuity" (21). Although he questions the possible "anthropomorphism" of such thoughts, he is convinced that "all living things are kindred" (21). And he calls for love. After years, Abbey tells us, one learns "to love" the swirling springtime winds for they are "as much a part of the canyon country as the silence and the glamorous distances" (16). He also argues that "[i]f we could learn to love space as deeply as we are now obsessed with time, we might discover a new meaning to the phrase *to live like men*" (58). Here Abbey equates time with "Progress," and living "like men" with love for the land: "But the love of wilderness is more than a hunger for what is always beyond reach; it is also an expression of loyalty to the earth" (167). Discussing his more pessimistic thoughts with a visitor to the park, Abbey finds himself accused of being "against civilization, against science, against humanity" (244). He argues that, being human, he cannot be "against humanity" and that he admires many of the greatest scientific minds the world has seen, from Thales to Einstein. Finally, he states, "How could I be against civilization when all that I most willingly defend and venerate--including the love of wilderness--is comprehended by the term" (244). This "love of wilderness" is the "loving eye."

Annie Dillard does not write of love per se in Pilgrim at Tinker Creek, but the exuberance with which she describes perception and the dizzying encounter with the "gifts" from the universe comes closest of all three authors to Frye's account of the "loving eye." Dillard does,

however, write of the lover. Dillard suggests that the lover constructs an "artificial obvious" in the same manner as the "knowledgeable," a scientist or a connoisseur (18). This construction would seem to be the opposite of Frye's "loving eye," the "arrogant eye," which might reduce an object to "the size of the seer's desire." But Dillard explains how the artificial obvious is "hard to see," that she sees instead what she expects. Her aunt's family can all draw beautiful quarter-horses because they live on a quarter-horse ranch and are "in the know." They "pay a certain sort of attention" (qtd. in Warren 75) to details and differences. They follow Frye's instructions: "One must look at the thing. One must look and listen and check and question." Dillard's lover does indeed have the "loving eye," for he questions received knowledge and relies on experience: "the herpetologist asks the native, 'Are there snakes in that ravine?' 'Nosir.' And the herpetologist comes home with, yessir, three bags full" (19).

Dillard strives throughout Pilgrim at Tinker Creek to see like the lover. She tries to see less what she expects and more what she does not. She seeks surprises. She is dazzled by the intricacy of the world. Frye points out that the loving eye "knows the complexity of the other as something which will forever present new things to be known." This thought is at the heart of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek: "the new is always present with the old, however hidden. The tree with the lights in it does not go out; that light shines on old world, now feebly, now bright" (241-2). Dillard "pays a certain sort of attention" and sees unexpected beauty and horror in nature. In waiting "alone and alert, but stilled in a special way" (176), Dillard sees the "extravagant landscape of the world" (146) with a "loving eye."

Marilyn Frye is certainly not the only theorist to use "love" in the sense of an open and critical attitude towards the Other. I am reminded of the love Julia Kristeva describes in Tales of

Love. Consider Lopez's idea that in "approaching the land with an attitude of obligation, willing to observe courtesies difficult to articulate--perhaps only a gesture of the hands--one establishes a regard from which dignity can emerge" (Arctic Dreams 405). Kristeva might argue that these "courtesies" are "difficult to articulate" because the "language of love is impossible, inadequate, immediately allusive when one would like it to be most straightforward; it is a flight of metaphors--it is literature" (Kristeva 1). For Kristeva, psychoanalysis itself is "an infinite quest for births and rebirths through the experience of love" which "is aptly called *wild*" (1). In "the rapture of love" meaning and reference become "blurred" and even the "limits of one's own identity vanish" (2). Lopez writes of his reverie at Axel Heiberg Island where the beauty

is a beauty you feel in your flesh. You feel it physically and that is why it is sometimes terrifying to approach. . . . I lost for long moments my sense of time and purpose as a human being. . . . What I loved as a man, the love for parents and wife and children and friends, I felt suffused with in that moment, flushed in the face. (404)

Kristeva notes that love "suggests a state of instability in which the individual is no longer indivisible and allows himself to become lost in the Other, for the Other. Within love, a risk that might otherwise be tragic is accepted, normalized, made fully reassuring" (4). Here Kristeva touches on the dangerous vulnerability of love. Lopez's "obscene" gesture of bowing to the horned lark and to the land itself is a risk made in love, out of a willingness to love. He is vulnerable to our misunderstanding and derision.

"Love," Kristeva declares, "is the time and space where 'I' assumes the right to be extraordinary. . . . Divisible, lost, annihilated. . . . I am, in love, at the zenith of subjectivity" (5).

In Arctic Dreams, it is at the zenith of his subjective response to the land that Lopez feels "for the first time the edges of an unentered landscape" and describes the "nature of reciprocity" and the "attitude of obligation"--love--as a "dignified relationship" with a land in which

the things fit together perfectly, even though they are always changing. I wish the order of my life to be arranged in the same way I find the light, the slight movement of the wind, the voice of a bird, the heading of a seed pod I see before me. This impeccable and indisputable integrity I want in myself. (404)

Kristeva writes that "the psyche is one open system connected to another, and only under those circumstances is it renewable. If it lives, your psyche is in love" (15). It is, paradoxically, through love's destabilizing of one's very "self" that one finds that "impeccable" integrity which Lopez finds in the land.

Theodor Adorno, in his Negative Dialectics, writes, "Unbroken and all too human slogans lend themselves to new equations between the subject and what is not its like. Things congeal as fragments of that which was subjugated; to rescue it means to love things" (191). Romand Coles has made the connection between Adorno's negative dialectics and Lopez's notion of love in an essay entitled, "Ecotones and Environmental Ethics: Adorno and Lopez." At the end of the essay, Coles writes, "Through Adorno and Lopez I have tried to explore an agonistic sensibility and thought entwined with an agonistic agape, both of which are crucial dimensions of an environmental ethic--an ecological judgement" (246-7). Coles outlines Adorno's "theory of judgement" as a "constellation of agonism, reconciliation, identity, non-identity" (237):

I call this a theory of *judgement* because what Adorno offers is not a specific code, set of rules or prescriptions--the world is far too wild to be subsumed--but rather a

number of concerns of which we must be continually mindful if we are to dwell conceptually and practically in a manner that contributes to the fertile freedom of humans and the earth. (237)

In being mindful of these "concerns" found in Adorno's constellation of ideas, Coles argues that we develop "a profound respect for nonidentity as such, for wildness" (239). This "profound respect" is Lopez's "love."

In Arctic Dreams, Lopez describes icebergs in Melville Bay: "They embodied the land. Austere. Implacable. Harsh but not antagonistic. . . . They were so beautiful they also made you afraid" (251). It is in this fearful awe that Lopez combines *ilira*, the Inuit word for "nervous awe," and agape. Both express a "profound respect" for the Other, not a desperate fear but a recognition of sheer unknowability and mysteriousness. And also a recognition of the relationship that exists between oneself and the Other. Lopez writes,

There is a word from the time of the cathedrals: agape, an expression of intense spiritual affinity with the mystery that is "to be sharing life with other life."

Agape is love, and it can mean "the love of another for the sake of God." More broadly and essentially it is a humble, impassioned embrace of something outside the self, in the name of that which we refer to as *God*, but which also includes the self and *is* God. (Arctic Dreams 250)

Coles takes Lopez's "spiritual affinity" to mean "an attraction born of austerity, fear, implacability, radical alterity, and distance, as well as of similarity, comfort, beauty, and proximity. Agape is an embrace at a distance of all the complexity of coexistence" (246). For Adorno, to "rescue" that which is subjugated by our concepts, by our desire, means "to love

things." This love is expressed in Lopez as agape: seeking out nonidentity, standing in awe and respect of the world. And, as I have shown, it is also Abbey's "love of wilderness" (Desert Solitaire 244) which demands a "capacity for wonder" (177), just as it is Dillard's "waiting becalmed" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 205) for terror or beauty in the gap between our expectations and the Real.

Affinity

This call to love found in Arctic Dreams, Desert Solitaire, and Pilgrim at Tinker Creek has affinities, in the sense of strong connections and compatibility, with several contemporary attempts to reenvision our understanding of the relationship of humans and their environment. This section will show the correspondence of the love outlined above with "postmodern science," environmental pragmatism, and ecofeminism.

Early in Arctic Dreams, Lopez writes, "I had no idea as I lay on those caribou skins that evening precisely where wisdom might lie. I knew enough of quantum mechanics to understand that the world is ever so slightly but uncorrectably out of focus, there are no absolutely precise answers. Whatever wisdom I would find, I knew, would grow out of the land" (40). He comes to this thought after mulling over some "good thoughts about the universe" such as the "insights of Planck and Dirac," physicist and mathematician respectively. Lopez returns to physics and mathematics several times in Arctic Dreams. In the chapter "Migration," for instance, he refers to Heisenberg, Schrodinger, Dirac, and Bohm "all writing about subatomic phenomena":

I believe that similar thoughts, potentially as beautiful in their complexity, arise with a consideration of how animals move in their landscapes. . . . We hardly know what these movements are in response to; we choose the dimensions of

space and the durations of time we think appropriate to describe them, but we have no assurance that they are relevant. (177)

Near the book's close Lopez suggests that "[t]he challenge to us, when we address the land, is to join with cosmologists in their ideas of continuous creation, and with physicists with their ideas of spacial and temporal paradox, to the subtle grace and mutability in the different landscapes" (412). Here Lopez makes explicit the affinity of his ideas with what has come to be called "postmodern science": "a theory of the world as a creative process of becoming, a world that is irreducibly complex and a world of which it must be recognized that we, as beings struggling to understand the world, are part" (Gare 124).

Abbey, to a far lesser degree, makes reference to contemporary physics in Desert Solitaire. His comments are sarcastic and refer to the use of physics for the production of bombs: "Now the high priests of nuclear physics dispute the number of electrons that can rotate on the head of a pin--where will this lead? But now their disputes are peaceful; only the bystanders get burned nowadays. . . . Opinions on [the movement of the universe] are revised, exchanged, forgotten and revived with comforting regularity, just as in the other 'hard' or exact sciences" (249). It is in the latter part of this quotation that we can discern a connection to Lopez's thoughts. The "hard" sciences have become far more aesthetic and philosophical since the dawn of quantum mechanics, and the world has once again become staggeringly complex and inscrutable.

Dillard's references to quantum mechanics are much more similar to Lopez's than Abbey's. Dillard quotes Einstein in the first chapter of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek: "nature conceals her mystery by means of her essential grandeur, not by her cunning" (7). After watching a hawk

migration through binoculars, she wonders what keeps the astronomers at Palomar "from falling, voiceless and blinded, from their tiny, vaulted chairs" (24). Dillard quotes "a subatomic physicist" in the chapter "The Present" in an effort to describe the present:

"[e]verything that has already happened is particles, everything in the future is waves." Let me twist his meaning. Here it comes. The particles are broken; the waves are translucent, laving, roiling with beauty like sharks. The present is the wave that explodes over my head, flinging the air with particles at the height of its breathless unroll; it is the live water and light that bears from undisclosed sources the freshest news, renewed and renewing, world without end. (102-3)

Dillard suggests that she might be able "to make out the landscape of the universe" if, among other concerns, she keeps her "eye on quantum physics" (138). She claims that even though many of us still live in the "universe of Newtonian physics, and fondly imagine that real, hard scientists have no use for these misty ramblings," Heisenberg "pulled out the rug" such that "some physicists are now a bunch of wild-eyed, raving mystics. . . . The electron is a muskrat; it cannot be perfectly stalked" (202-3). Let us not forget that Dillard describes herself in the text as ranging "wild-eyed, flying over fields and plundering the woods, no longer quite fit for company" (266). Except, perhaps, for the company of quantum physicists.

These lists of citations serve to show that all three authors find in contemporary science a similar regard for the universe as an inscrutable mystery. A better name for the science to which they refer is "postmodern science":

Postmodern science--by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information,

"*fracta*," catastrophes, and pragmatic paradoxes - is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, nonrectifiable, and paradoxical. (Lyotard 60)

Relativity theory, quantum theory, and chaos theory have all contributed to an erosion of the modern, mechanistic theories which preceded them. Postmodern science, or "post-mechanistic science," rejects the "tendency to conceive of the world as a collection of predictable things to be controlled"(Gare 116). The new narratives of postmodern science acknowledge that "there can be no final closure, that it is always possible to make some creative advance in understanding which breaks with all preconceptions" (Gare 113). As Lopez writes, "the land is not a painting; the image cannot be completed this way" (Arctic Dreams 172).

Where classical science asserts that we, as observers, are separate from the object we observe, theories such as the Theory of Relativity suggest that what we perceive as "independent particles are really inseparable from the greater undivided whole of the rest of the universe. Separateness is an artificial construct imposed by our own minds" (Pepper 247). Quantum physics shows how electrons move in "strange" ways that are not predictable by classical physics. David Pepper writes, "In this and other ways twentieth-century scientists discovered that their questions about the behaviour of nature at [the] subatomic level were answered by seeming paradoxes--contradictions of 'common-sense'" (248).

In describing the implication of postmodern science, Pepper explains three principles put forward by physicist David Bohm: everything in the universe mirrors everything else, wholeness is flowing movement, and the universe has countless dimensions (253-4). In Bohm's universe, discreet objects are "abstractions of things out of the total flow," they are what our theories and instruments determine them to be; reality is a "flux," in which everything is changing and "what

'is' is also 'becoming'; there are no solid objects or fixed truths (Pepper 225). The universe, perceived in such a way and with an acknowledgement of the limits of our understanding and of our "common-sense," is described perfectly by Lopez as "continuous creation"; its landscapes, from the smallest particle to the "Horsehead Nebula in Orion" are "crucibles of mystery" (Arctic Dreams 412).

In The Reenchantment of Science: Postmodern Proposals, David Ray Griffin describes how a "disenchanted worldview" has been a "result and a presupposition of modern science," and that in "disenchanted nature, the modern science of nature led to its own disenchantment" (1,2). By disenchantment, Griffin means "most fundamentally . . . the denial to nature of all subjectivity, all experience, all feeling" (2). Griffin translates Max Weber's term for disenchantment, *Entzäuberung*, literally as "taking the magic out" (2). Disenchantment, Griffin argues, led to the view of the human mind or soul as "epiphenomenal," to the reductionist idea of "explaining everything in terms of elementary impersonal processes":

Hence, no role exists in the universe for purposes, values, ideas, possibilities, and qualities, and there is no freedom, creativity, temporality, or divinity. There are no norms, not even truth, and everything is ultimately meaningless.

The ironic conclusion is that modern science, in disenchanting nature, began a trajectory that ended in disenchanting science itself. If all human life is meaningless, then science, as one of its activities, must share in this meaninglessness. (3)

This disenchantment is being reversed by new views on the nature of science and the origin of modern science, by new scientific developments such as quantum mechanics, and through

reflection on the "mind-body problem" (8). Griffin writes that a "reenchanted, liberating science," will be developed only by transcending the dualisms of modern science, and that only by accepting such a postmodern science will we transcend individualism, nationalism, militarism, anthropocentrism, and androcentrism (xiii).

Certainly this notion of "reenchantment," re-introducing the "magic" that was taken out, is echoed in Lopez's formulation of our obligation "[t]o intend from the beginning to preserve some of the mystery within [the land] as a kind of wisdom to be experienced, not questioned" (Arctic Dreams 228). Lopez also calls for us to recognize a degree of subjectivity in the non-human world, this mysterious, sacred world which "retains an identity of its own, still deeper and more subtle than we can know" (228). And Dillard's claim that physicists are mystics is supported by arguments that quantum theory "did promote mysticism":

as these physicists became aware that physical theory gave them only shadows and symbols of reality, rather than reality itself, they became freed from the materialistic worldview and hence open to taking their own conscious experience as real and revelatory. (Griffin 13)

In the terms I've employed thus far, those "shadows and symbols" *are* reality; that which is beyond is the Real. Physicists were drawn to a new perspective on the physical universe, the Real, because "physics *failed* to lead them beyond subject-object dualism and toward a direct experience" of the Real (Zimmerman 286).

John B. Cobb, Jr. argues that three movements struggled for supremacy in the seventeenth century: Aristotelian philosophy, a "magical vision" of the world, and the mechanistic worldview (Cobb 102). The teleological Aristotelian tradition faded out, and the

magical tradition, believing "nature was alive with spirit," was seen as a threat to Christianity. Even though we can find traces of the magical in Newton, a "worldview composed of purely material, and therefore purely passive, entities became completely self-sufficient. This materialistic, atheistic view came to be known as the Newtonian worldview!" (103). This view was "never adequate to the evidence" and simply did not work in subatomic physics. Many scientists conclude that "we are condemned to paradox and unintelligibility," but this conclusion stems from a "reason" tied to the mechanistic worldview (104). Cobb proposes as an alternative a "postmodern ecological worldview" which argues in essence that "all the units of reality are internally related to others. All units or individuals are constituted by their relations" (108). Cobb's ecological worldview tells us that it was a mistake to believe "we could isolate some elements from the whole and learn the truth about them in abstraction" (111). Lopez's questioning of "the tyranny of statistics," of maps, and of the "standardized animal" stems from such an "ecological worldview." He shows how these abstractions are, as Cobb writes, "never adequate to the to the evidence" and that the world is intimately interconnected. The particulars are a stain upon mechanistic science, especially as it is used by industry.

Cobb's notion of internal relations, as opposed to the "external relations" of the Newtonian worldview where objects are discrete and relate only through the laws of physics, is echoed in the arguments of many of those who call for a "postmodern science," such as Griffin, Gare, Charles Birch, and M.E. Zimmerman. David Bohm, a physicist to whom Lopez refers in Arctic Dreams, writes,

according to quantum physics, ultimately no continuous motion exists; an internal relationship between the parts and the whole, among the various parts, and a

context-dependence, which is very much a part of the same thing, all do exist. An indivisible connection between elements also exists which cannot be further analysed. All of that adds up to the notion that the world is one unbroken whole.

(Bohm 64)

This "internal relationship" must be understood to be "characteristic not only of living beings but also of the most elementary physical units" (Griffin 14). Internal relatedness is a necessary step in overcoming subject-object dualism, which would ultimately involve "the attribution of other essential features of subjects, such as feeling, memory, and aim or decision, at least in embryonic form, all the way down" (Griffin 14). All the way down, that is, to insects, bacteria, DNA and RNA, and even to the atom "acting as a self-regulating whole" (Griffin 14-5). These notions are about as far from a mechanistic worldview, denying subjectivity to the world, as we can go, and internal relatedness surfaces again and again when scientists try to understand the mysteries of quantum physics.

Biology, however, is still dominated by a "strictly mechanistic" model of life (Birch 69). This suggestion is surprising given the centrality of internal relationships to what Cobb calls the "ecological worldview." In his essay, "The Postmodern Challenge to Biology," Charles Birch argues that it is the success of the mechanistic model that solidifies biologist's "commitment to Cartesianism" (70). Here again we must recall Lopez's call to move beyond our "Aristotelian and Cartesian sense of animals as objects . . . our singlemindedness in unraveling their workings" (Arctic Dreams 150). Birch challenges biology to recognize internal relations:

The idea of internal relations is that a human being, let us say, is not the same person independent of his or her environment. The human being is a subject and

not simply an object pushed around by external relations. . . . The postmodern view that makes the most sense to me is the one that takes human experience as a high-level exemplification of entities in general, be they cells or atoms or electrons. All are subjects. All have internal relations. Consequently, in biology a distinction is made between a biology that is *compositional* (substantialist) and one that is *relational* (ecological). (Birch 70-1)

Birch uses several example to show the "relational" side of biology: the influence of thoughts on the human body; the "holographic model" of the brain where recalled images are the consequence of "the interrelation of many cells as a whole"; Jane Goodall's research into the complex internal relations of chimpanzees; and molecular "ecology" and the variety of ways in which DNA molecules express themselves depending on the internal relations within their environment (Birch 72-4). Like Lopez, as well as Abbey and Dillard, Birch refers to the "mind of the animal" and the attempt to "imaginatively enter one another's lives" including "other living organisms" with whom we participate in life (73). Birch writes, "If the needs of neighbors stretch beyond human needs, so does the reach of love" (73). And here then is the return to the affinity with Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard and their call for love. David Bohm writes,

if we can obtain an intuitive and imaginative feeling of the whole world as constituting an implicit order that is enfolded in us, we will sense ourselves to be one with the world. We will no longer be satisfied merely to manipulate it technically to our supposed advantage, but we will feel a genuine love for it. (Bohm 67)

Such a love does not imply full knowledge or understanding of the world but instead recognizes

our complex relationship with it. Such a love "reenchants" the world and allows us to "preserve some of the mystery" and "to be alert for its openings, for that moment when something sacred reveals itself within the mundane" (Arctic Dreams 228).

The idea that the world is, as Lopez calls it, "fundamentally mysterious" is also found in contemporary writing in the area of "environmental pragmatism." Environmental pragmatism is defined by Andrew Light and Eric Katz as "the open-ended inquiry into the specific real-life problems of humanity's relationship with the environment" and is "informed by the legacy of classical American pragmatist philosophy" (Light and Katz 2). Kelly A. Parker, in her essay "Pragmatism and Environmental Thought," describes the early American pragmatists Charles S. Pierce, William James, Josiah Royce, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead as all sharing in the "rejection of foundationalist epistemology": "There are no innate beliefs, intuitions or other indubitable 'givens' upon which our knowledge is built, or in terms of which the truth or meaning of concepts can be analyzed" (22). William James tells us that a pragmatist

turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards actions and towards power. . . . It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality, and the pretence of finality in truth. (James 55-6).

It is the "concreteness" of experience and the rejection of closed systems that form the basis for the environmental pragmatists' approach to the "possibilities of nature" and their preservation.

Pragmatist philosophers are concerned with "experience, the most basic term in pragmatism" (Parker 29). The quality of experiences, defined by Parker as "transactions of

organisms and their environments," is determined by both the quality of the environment and what each organism "brings to the encounter" (29). Parker writes

the very idea that the environment funds experience involves the notion that there is an ineffable aspect to the world. It is indeed arrogant to think that we can master nature; it is moreover delusional and self-negating. If we have our being in the ongoing encounter with the environment, then to will that the environment become a fully settled, predictable thing, a mere instrumental resource⁷ in which there can *be* no further novelty, is to will that we undergo no further growth in experience. The attempt to dominate nature completely is thus an attempt to annihilate the ultimate source of our growth, and hence to annihilate ourselves.

(30)

For the pragmatist, the world holds the same fundamental strangeness described by the three authors I have been studying. The world "out there" which is always beyond our language, beyond our conceptions, always escapes our naming and returns to render our fantasy-reality uncanny. Environmental pragmatism recognizes that attempts to make the world "predictable" are futile except through destroying so much of it that there is less opportunity for the new experiences which enrich us. Dillard asks the creek to surprise her, for she knows it can and does: "the new is always present with the old, however hidden" (Pilgrim at Tinker Creek 242).

Pragmatism demands that we recognize this "novelty" of the world.

⁷ Such concern with the possibility of making the environment "a fully settled, predictable thing, a mere instrumental resource" is central to Theodor Adorno Negative Dialectics, as I noted above. "[O]bjects do not go into their concepts," he argues, "without leaving a remainder, . . . they come to contradict the traditional norm of adequacy. . . . the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived" (5).

I used the expression "out there" in the above paragraph in the same way it is used by Lopez, meaning the world that lies both before and beyond the one postulated in the laboratory, rendered on maps, or preconceived in our minds. Parker describes it as "the 'stuff' of chaotic, unassimilated raw experience. . . . the unknown, an ineffable but insistent existential reality that is larger than ourselves and our settled knowledge" (Parker 23). But of course we are a part of that world. Parker writes that pragmatism "emphasizes not substantial beings, but interrelations, connectedness, transactions and entanglements" as constitutive of the "world we encounter" (25). Our reality, understood as "process and development," is thus a contingent understanding of "a nexus of relations in an ever-shifting universe of complex relationships" (23).

This understanding is almost exactly the view held by postmodern science with its emphasis on the "internal relations" of organisms and matter. In arguing for pragmatism as an environmental ethic, Sandra B. Rosenthal and Rogene A. Buchholtz describe how pragmatism focuses on the organism and "organism-environment adaptation": "Neither human activity in general nor human knowledge can be separated from the fact that this being is a natural organism dependent upon a natural environment. . . . no organism can exist in isolation from an environment, and an environment is what is in relations to an organism" (Rosenthal and Buchholtz 40). They call for the development of "creative intelligence, the imaginative grasp of authentic possibilities, the vitality of motivation and a deepened attunement" to the interrelatedness of humans with the "environment in which they are embedded" (46). Similarly, Lopez writes,

The animal's environment, the background against which we see it, can be rendered as something like the animal itself--partly unchartable. And to try to

understand the animal apart from the background, except as an imaginative exercise⁸, is to risk the collapse of both. To be what they are they require each other. (Arctic Dreams 177)

Lopez makes note of an experiment in which polar bears were declared "inefficient walkers" because they overheated in treadmill tests. An experienced polar bear biologist told him that the efficiency of the polar bear is tuned to the landscape and weather of its particular environment. Lopez also describes research on arctic lemmings: "Its apparently simple life on the tundra suggests it can be grasped, while its frantic migrations make it seem foolish. In the end, it is complex in its behavior, intricately fitted into its world, and mysterious" (36). In a similar manner, pragmatism adopts a "non-spectator understanding" of the "inherently relational aspects" of humans and their environment, refusing to separate subject and object, object and background (Rosenthal and Buchholtz 40).

It is in the context of the "internal relations" of beings that Parker notes that pragmatism urges the promotion of "*sustainability* and *diversity*" since what enriches the world and the experience of the world enriches all of us (32). What constitutes "sustainable" or "diverse" is never understood as a fixed by pragmatists. "Knowing," explains Parker, "is thus an open-ended quest for greater certainty in our understanding; if we forget that our understanding is fallible, the philosophical quest for wisdom may devolve into a pathological crusade for absolute certainty" (22). Anthony Weston argues that pragmatism "celebrates a wide-open and diverse culture" and

⁸ The import of Lopez's qualification "except as an imaginative exercise" is somewhat unclear. It seems to suggest that thinking of the animal as an object apart from its environment is an exercise in fancy, in trying to conceive of something quite different to how it is in nature. His qualification then points out that this fanciful exercise is, in fact, how most people *do* conceive of the animal.

that what has yet to be accepted by environmental ethicists is pragmatism's "inconclusiveness and open-endedness, its demand that we struggle for our own values without being closed to the values and hopes of others" (Weston 303).

The rejection of "foundationalist epistemology" is reflected in Lopez's valorizing of "the capacity to imagine beyond the familiar" (Arctic Dreams 176). Lopez, as well as Abbey and Dillard, share with pragmatism an acceptance and openness to the unknowable in the world, what I have defined above as love. Weston writes:

alone in the woods we find ourselves feeling a sense of gratefulness, of "awe," finally almost of intrusion, a feeling which probably has its closest parallel in those responses to other *people* which make us want to attribute *them* rights. . . . real respect for others comes only through the concrete experience and finally "awe" of the other. (301)

This description of awe and respect is a rich illustration of the affinity of pragmatism with Lopez, Abbey, Dillard: an open-ended quest for certainty, guided by love understood as awe and respect of the "ineffable aspect" of the world.

Ecological feminism or "ecofeminism" is yet another contemporary approach to the understanding of our relationship with the natural world and has much in common with the writings of Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard. Françoise d'Eaubonne introduced the term "ecofeminisme" in 1974 "to bring attention to women's potential for bringing about an ecological revolution" (Warren, "Power" 19). The term has been used in a wide variety of ways since its introduction, but I will confine my discussion to Karen J. Warren's understanding of ecological feminism:

the position that there are important connections--historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical--between the domination of women and the domination of nature. . . . the promise and power of ecological feminism is that *it provides a distinctive framework both for reconceiving feminism and for developing an environmental ethic which takes seriously connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature.* ("Power" 19)

For Warren, ecological feminism addresses "oppressive conceptual frameworks" which explain, justify, and maintain "relationships of domination and subordination" through "value-hierarchical thinking," "value dualisms," and a "logic of domination" (20-1). She points out that she does not view value-hierarchical thinking and value dualisms as inherently problematic. What *is* problematic, however, is the way in which such forms of dichotomous thinking are coupled with the logic of domination to "establish inferiority and justify subordination" (21).

As an example of an oppressive conceptual framework, Warren outlines the argument for the twin domination of women and nature:

[1]Women are identified with nature and the realm of the physical; men are identified with the "human" and the realm of the mental.

[2]Whatever is identified with nature and the realm of the physical is inferior to ("below") whatever is identified with the "human" and the realm of the mental: or, conversely, the latter is superior to ("above") the former.

[3]Thus, women are inferior to ("below") men; or, conversely, men are superior to ("above") women.

[4]For any X and Y, if X is superior to Y, then X is justified in subordinating Y.

[5]Thus, men are justified in subordinating women. (22)

Warren shows how this argument for the domination of women and nature is flawed both in the assumption that women are less "human" [1], and in the hierarchical and dualistic thinking involved in the notion that anything less "human" is inferior [2]. The argument also presupposes that the "superior" is justified in subordinating the inferior (4). Warren also writes that the ecofeminist critique of this whole argument "is also a critique of patriarchal conceptual frameworks generally. . . . Therefore, ecofeminism is necessary to *any* feminist critique of patriarchy, and, hence, to feminism" (23). Any consideration of the subordination of women must, at some point, address the subordination of nature to humans.

Philosopher Val Plumwood argues that "[a]nthropocentrism and androcentrism in particular are linked by the rationalist conception of the human self as masculine, and by the account of authentically human characteristics as centered around rationality and the exclusion of its contrasts (especially characteristics regarded as feminine, animal, or natural), as less human" ("Nature" 21). A patriarchal framework maintains the view of rationalism and reason as divided from emotion,

of "desire," caring, and love as merely "personal" and "particular" as opposed to the universality and impartiality of understanding and of "feminine" emotions as essentially unreliable, untrustworthy, and morally irrelevant, an inferior domain to be dominated by a superior, disinterested (and of course) masculine reason. (5)

Plumwood argues that reason is constructed in such a manner that it is taken to characterize the "authentically human," creating at once a cleavage between humans and the non-human Other, between man and women, and, within the human self, between reason and emotion, mind and

body (6). Since reason involves abstraction and "universalization," the emotional and the particular "are seen as the enemy of the rational, as corrupting, capricious, and self-interested" (6). But ecological feminism does not reject reason as such any more than it rejects the need for hierarchical and dualistic thinking. It does, however, reject the valorisation of reason and rationality, and the coterminous construction, the "disenchantment," of the non-rational: "Nature, as the excluded and devalued contrast of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilized, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness" (Plumwood, Feminism 19-20). The "human qualities and aspects of life" associated with nature defined in this manner are made to seem inferior, and Plumwood shows how this conceptual structure appears in the domination of women, manual labourers, people of colour, and animals (29). All are constructed as less human and inferior, and are thus subject to domination.

Karen J. Warren describes ecological feminism as contextualist, pluralistic, inclusivist, and "anti-naturist," that is, anti-essentialist, refusing to assume that women are "by their nature" closer to the material world than men. Ecological feminism reconceives theory as theory in process. It makes no attempt to provide an "objective" point of view, and it makes a central place for values of care, love, friendship, trust, and appropriate reciprocity, and it reconceives what it means to be human (Warren 32-3). She turns to Marilyn Frye's notion of the "loving eye," discussed previously, and explains how an ecofeminist perspective involves the shift from "arrogant perception," which maintains sameness and hierarchy, to "loving perception," which "presupposes and maintains *difference*" such that "perception of the other as other is an expression of love for one who/which is recognized from the outset as independent, dissimilar,

different" (29). Plumwood calls for a similar shift in perception from a culture oriented toward domination to a culture oriented toward *survival* and "mutually sustaining relationships between humans and the earth" (Feminism 195). In the human sphere, these relationships are found in "care, friendship, and love" (195).

Ecological feminism is an effort to reconceive our relationship with the non-human Other as love. It is through the criticism of the oppressive conceptual framework of patriarchy--including the over-valuing of dualistic thinking, of value hierarchy, and of "objective" reason--that ecological feminism seeks to re-establish the value of particularity, internal relations, and emotion, and to show how the trivializing of these elements goes hand in hand with the subordination of women and, following the logic of the ecofeminist critique of patriarchy, *anything* that is non-human, non-male, non-white, and non-privileged.

There are passages in Arctic Dreams where Lopez highlights the connection between dominating nature and dominating women. While touring the oil rigs and distant camps of the oil industry, Lopez feels misgiving at the "sullen, dismissive attitude taken towards the land, the violent way in which it is addressed" (397). But Lopez also notes:

Pornographic magazines abound, which seems neither here nor there until one realizes that they are nearly inescapable, and that they are part of a resentful attitude toward the responsibility of family life. There is a distrust, a cursing of women, that is unsettling. Woman and machinery and the land are all spoken of in the same way--seduction, domestication, domination, control. . . . It is as real as the scars on the faces of the flight attendants I interviewed in Alaska who were physically and sexually abused by frustrated workmen flying to and from Prudhoe

Bay. (398)

Family life with its responsibilities and relationships is rejected; women and the land are objectified and dominated by violence. The attitude towards women which Lopez encounters in the Arctic typifies "arrogant perception" with its "attitude of 'conquer and control'" (Warren 29). The logic of domination--assuming oneself to be justified in subjugating anything one perceives as inferior--can be seen in Lopez's descriptions of the workers attitude towards women and the land.

In a manner very similar to the arguments of ecological feminism, Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard call for an altered perspective, for a change in attitude towards the particular. As I have shown, all three writers are critical of reductionist and universalizing attitudes towards the world. It is a critique shared with ecofeminists who also call for a return to love beyond reason. There is much common ground here with the postmodern scientists and the environmental pragmatists. The ecofeminists, however, focus especially on the issue of domination.

Suzanne Clark suggests that the narrator of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek moves outside the convention of non-fiction in her *refusal to assert authority* over the subject of her text. The narrator speaks the "special, *unreasonable* knowledge of the lover, the child, the poet, and the mystic" (Clark 159). The narrator, "not so much the subject of knowing as subjected to it," represents a "differing from *rational* order" (Clark 159, italics mine). Clark argues that the "feminine ecstatic impersonality" of Dillard's narrator is a mode of "authority which also refuses to exert authority" (170). Because Dillard does not represent the narrator of Pilgrim at Tinker Creek as a woman, this narrator does not "solidify into any figure of certain identity" and ultimately "ruptures the masculine subject [of non-fiction] and the hierarchies established around

the unified individual" (175). Dillard forsakes the traditional "objective," mode of narrating non-fiction for a personal, ecstatic, poetic narrative focusing on the particular and the mystical. Dillard defies the patriarchal conventions of non-fiction by observing with a "loving eye," by refusing to assert authority or mastery over the non-human, and by rejecting the dualisms of reason and emotion, the universal and the particular, the scientific and the sacred.

Abbey's writings have provoked accusations of misogyny, and though I will not defend him, I believe there are some shared concerns between his writing in Desert Solitaire and the project of ecological feminism. On a fundamental level, Abbey's self-declared and well-documented anarchist leanings call for radical questioning and rethinking of dualisms and hierarchies of patriarchy identified by ecofeminist: reason/emotion, universal/particular, progress/survival. As well, Abbey's description of the love of wilderness, of winds, and of space is similar to Plumwood's description of the "mutually sustaining relationships between humans and the earth." Abbey writes of relationships with the non-human based on "[s]ympathy, mutual aid, symbiosis, continuity," and trust (21).

There are closer parallels between Arctic Dreams and the project of ecological feminism. It is interesting to note that Karen J. Warren's essay, "The Power and Promise of Ecological Feminism," ends with a recounting of a Sioux story about hunting. A grandfather explains to his grandson the ritual of thanks and offering which must be performed when one has killed a deer. He explains suffering, reciprocity, and survival. Warren is struck by the power of the environmental ethic found in the narrative: care, loving perception, appropriate reciprocity, and "doing what is appropriate in a given situation" (Warren 36). The ritual is very similar to Lopez's bow to the Arctic and its inhabitants.

Val Plumwood describes indigenous peoples' "formation of identity, social and personal, in relation to particular areas of land" as "love": a "rich, caring relationship" which is "particular, emotional, and kinship-based," as opposed to a "rationalistic preoccupation with the universal" and the "impartial" ("Nature" 15). This love is indeed the same ethic that Lopez locates in the traditional ways of the native peoples of the Arctic and wishes for in himself and others. He celebrates the "native eye" of the Inuit hunters whose minds, Lopez believes, work in a "nonrational, nonlinear" manner, recognizing that "things exist only insofar as they can be related to other things" (200). In a traditional hunting society, the hunter attended to the "myriad relationships he understood bound him to the world he occupied" with animals (200). It is hard for him to imagine separating himself from the world of animals, of objectifying and treating them impersonally. His hunting is undertaken with profound care. The subordinating of such traditional worldviews--particular, relational, emotional-- the ignoring of them by science and politics, is symptomatic of patriarchy. As the ecofeminists argue, the subordination of women, people of colour, and the natural world is justified through the same dualisms and hierarchies which privilege humans constructed as male and white.

Postmodern science, pragmatism, and ecological feminism all share with Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard a desire for a new understanding of our relationship with the world, one that embraces interrelations, acknowledges limits to our understanding, and emphasizes particularity over universalization and abstraction. Lopez argues that we need a "more particularized understanding of the land itself . . . a deeper understanding of its nature, as if it were, itself, another sort of civilization we had to reach some agreement with" (*Arctic Dreams* 12). I like his notion of negotiating civilizations and find it echoed in Val Plumwood's conclusion to Feminism

and the Mastery of Nature:

If rationality is to have any function for long-term survival, it must . . . find a form which encourages sensitivity to the conditions under which we exist on earth, one which recognizes and accommodates the denied relationships of dependency and enables us to acknowledge our debt towards sustaining others of the earth. This implies creating a democratic culture beyond dualism, ending colonizing relationships and finding a mutual, ethical basis for enriching coexistence with earth others. We can realign reason . . . with social formations built on radical democracy, co-operation, and mutuality. (195-6)

Plumwood moves from a consideration of our "denied relationships" with the human and the non-human to the creation of a human culture based on radical democracy which will enrich our relationship with the non-human Other. It is a subtle but significant shift, and one which I wish to make. I will conclude this chapter with a consideration of the correlations between the ethic found in the nature writers and the environmental theorists on which I have focused and contemporary re-evaluations of democracy.

Radical Democracy: irreducible subjects and impossible closure

I must make it clear that I do not intend to argue for (or against) the extension of the realm of politics to include non-humans as subjects. My intention here is to explore the connections between the "attitude of regard" found in the texts of Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard and the theorizing of radical democracy by writers such as Slavoj Žižek, Chantal Mouffe, Richard Rorty, and William Connolly. I will extend my discussion of interrelatedness, particularity, and the limits of knowledge into a more overtly political arena. My argument is that all of these

writers--nature writers, postmodern scientists, pragmatists, ecofeminists, and social theorists--are engaged in similar projects in adjoining terrain and that reading the works of each group enriches the reading of the others. The social theorists argue for the recognition of the fundamentally irreducible "strangeness" of individuals and society itself and for the understanding of democracy as an endlessly open, infinite, and contested process.

In Chapter Two, I made extensive use of the writings of Slavoj Žižek to give a psychoanalytic underpinning to Lopez's study of desire and mystery. I return to Žižek again to extend Žižek's argument concerning dignity: "What confers on the other the dignity of a 'person' is not any universal-symbolic feature but precisely what is 'absolutely particular' about him, his fantasy, that part of him that we can be sure we can never share" (*Looking* 156). Žižek suggests that this dignity which "resists universalization" is a stain upon "formal democracy." The democratic subject is "not a human person, 'man' in all the richness of his needs, interests and beliefs" but is instead "a pure singularity, emptied of all content" (163, 164). He is a product of a "violent act of abstraction" (163). The "problem," Žižek argues, is not that democracy aims at dissolving all substantial ties of the subject to race, sex, religion, wealth, etc., but that "*it can never dissolve them*." The subject of democracy is, in its very blankness, smeared with a certain 'pathological stain'" (164-5). Just as the "standard animal" of science is stained with the particularity of the animals "out there" in the field, the ones whose behaviour cannot be adequately predicted, the democratic subject is always stained by the remainder created through the process of abstraction. That remainder is, of course, the support and "positive condition" of democracy. Without the particular subjects in all the "richness" of their needs, there is no society, no democracy. Just as science cannot fully universalize the *particular* "objects" of its

study, formal democracy "remains forever tied to a contingent moment of positivity, of material 'content': by losing this material support, the very form dissolves itself" (165).

Chantal Mouffe describes a similar "unresolvable tension between the principles of equality and liberty," that is, between the abstracted "citizen" and the particularized "individual" (Preface 13). Paraphrasing Žižek, she writes, "The victory of democratic pluralism . . . requires the acknowledgement that the multitude of dreams is irreducible" (5). For Mouffe, it is imperative to proceed in radicalizing democracy with an understanding that all identities "are forms of identifications and are necessarily precarious and unstable" and that no subject has an "original identity" (10-11). Further, she writes, "the plurality of forms of identities through which we are constituted and which correspond to our insertion in a variety of social relations, as well as their tension, should be legitimized" (5). This legitimization is the conferring of dignity, the recognition of the "particular absolute" of others' fantasies, their identities.

From the precariousness of the identity of the individual subject, Mouffe moves to the "open and unsutured character of the social" (Laclau and Mouffe 193). In Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau argue that radical democracy should set out to institutionalize the "moment of tension, of openness, which gives the social its essentially incomplete and precarious character" (190). They suggest that the "myth of a rational and transparent society" must recede in the face of the "irreducible character" of society's "diversity and plurality," its own "impossibility" (191). This understanding of human society as an unknowable and constantly unfolding process is, of course, the understanding of the world we find in Arctic Dreams, Desert Solitaire, and Pilgrim at Tinker Creek. Lopez writes, "the land is not a painting; the image cannot be completed this way" (Arctic Dreams 172). The land, the

landscapes within it and containing it, are irreducible and dynamic. It is not only arrogant to believe we could adequately conceptualize the land or the social, but Mouffe points out that such belief moves towards totalitarianism and fundamentalism (187).

Richard Rorty's neo-pragmatist philosophy celebrates the "ironist" who "faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires" (Contingency xv). The ironist feels that the task of the intellectual is "to increase our skill at recognizing and describing the different sorts of little things around which individuals or communities center their fantasies and their lives" (93). Žižek himself makes a correlation between Rorty's "different sorts of little things" and his own "particular absolute" of fantasy. For Rorty, the ultimate cruelty is the humiliation of others by shattering their fantasies, showing their beliefs to be ridiculous, by destroying their world and its very foundations. Rorty agrees with Marilyn Frye's idea that there is really no distinction "between imagination and courage" in those who dare to rely on *their own understanding* to make meaning in an effort at liberation. He suggests that "such courage is indistinguishable from the imagination it takes to hear oneself as a spokesperson of a merely possible community, rather than as a lonely, perhaps crazed, outcast from the actual one" ("Feminism" 132). These courageous individuals, recognizing the precariousness and contingency of the language which structures their own fantasy, persist in their beliefs in an effort at overcoming the oppression of the accepted vocabulary which makes them outcasts. Rorty argues that we must "modify our practices so as to take account of new descriptions of what has been going on" (128). We must keep our understanding open and be attentive to the language of those outcasts which might, as Catharine MacKinnon writes, "say something that has never been heard" (qtd. in Rorty, "Feminism" 125).

Lopez asked a man from Anaktuvuk Pass what he did when he visited a new place. The man responded, "I listen" (*Arctic Dreams* 257). This response is similar in spirit to Rorty's insistence that we become attentive to the "unsilenced" voices which might say something "that has never been heard." But it is in Dillard that we find this attentiveness examined most thoroughly. Confronted with a world which to her understanding seems more and more "freakish," Dillard asks "Must I then part ways with the only world I know?" (176). Here she faces the contingency of her beliefs and thus stands as an "ironist." Her altered perspectives on the world leave her "dizzy" and, like Rorty's ironist, "perhaps crazed." Dillard, like the courageous in Rorty, no longer speaks the vocabulary of the accepted worldview and becomes a mad outcast: "no longer quite fit for company" (266). Her text is a "new description," of a world with which we thought we were familiar. *Our* responsibility is then to take account of such descriptions and allow them to modify our practices and our vocabulary, allowing "something that has never been heard" to be spoken and recognized.

William E. Connolly suggests that identities and fantasies are indispensable but also, ultimately, irreducible. He notes that identities become naturalized "always imperfectly" and that the categories into which individuals are placed do not "exhaust" those individuals. The alternatives given (you are either this or that) "do not suffice" ("Voices" 224, n8). The same is said for social "contending constituencies." Critical responsiveness to pluralism might help such constituencies "acknowledge traces of the other in themselves":

Each [contending constituency] may even come to feel that it is implicated in a set of differences that help to define it *and* inhabited by diffuse energies, remainders and surpluses that persistently exceed its powers of articulation. It may, thereby,

affirm a certain indebtedness to what it is not while recognizing dogmatic interpretations of what it is. A new respect might emerge for drives by the other to break out of injurious definitions, even as those drives destabilize and denaturalize the identity of established constituencies. (*Ethos* xviii)

Here Connolly describes the relational aspect of identity and the irreducible remainder created through articulation which has been central to all of the writers and theorists in this chapter. No definition can exhaust me, nor can mine exhaust the Other. For Connolly, this critical responsiveness is a principle in which "new spaces are produced for alternatives to consolidate themselves and to contest established closures" ("Voices" 224, n8). As "political reflection," the point of such responsiveness is "to open up possibilities for alliance where primarily identity and strangeness were before, to pluralize new points of intersection so that the old fixtures of politics become more open to modification" (224). In an interesting turn, Connolly extends these ideas of identity and "strangeness" beyond politics and the relationship of humans and the environment.

In his essay "Voices from the Whirlwind," Connolly shows how the defining of nature as moral and ordered produces suffering and "strangers." He studies the Biblical story of Job and the memoir of a nineteenth-century hermaphrodite, and shows how the "frightening possibilities" of "[c]ontingency, luck, and blind fate" in the world threaten the sense of justice and order in both Job's and Alex/ina's community. Reacting to these threats, the communities make outcasts of victims like Job or of anomalies, such as the hermaphrodite Alex/ina, who comes to see herself as a "gross mistake" (212). Connolly argues that the voice from the whirlwind which speaks to Job "calls up images of energy, diversity, strangeness, and uncanniness in nature. . . .

These energies, forces, and beasts reflect the wonder of an earth more diverse, strange, vital, and vast than anything Job or his friends have been able to digest in their morally ordered universe" (204). Connolly calls for a "political constellation informed by (contestable) Jobian presumptions" which might "acknowledge the indispensability of culture [identity and difference] to life while affirming the imperative for political contestation of closures" (216-7). Connolly's formulations of "agonistic pluralism" and "critical responsiveness" create a "politics of generous negotiation/coalition/ contestation" and cultivate "strangeness" in our own identities as well as in those of others. He calls for an "attentiveness to whirlwinds within and without" (221), a metaphor for the strange and irreducible in the world and the individual. Within the politics Connolly envisions, fundamentalists bent on closure and "the institutionalization of established assumptions" would run the greatest risk of becoming "radical strangers." And, where Rorty calls for attentiveness to "new descriptions" and voices, Connolly envisions the possibility of "subterranean voices" becoming more audible "on behalf of the politicization of cultural mechanisms through which strangers are produced and subjugated" (223).

In the Job story, Connolly draws our attention to the mention of what is evidently a crocodile. The voice of the whirlwind asks, "Will you pass a string through his nose or crack his jaw with a pin? Will he plead with you for mercy and timidly beg your pardon?" (qtd. in Connolly, "Voices" 205). Connolly notes, "You are a matter of indifference when [the crocodile] is full, a prey to be devoured when it is hungry" (205). We will not find any recognition of our humanity in the "eye of the crocodile," which Connolly calls a "Jobian metaphor for the world" (205):

The eye of the crocodile, the whirlwind, Alex/ina, the ambiguity of "nature," the

insufficiency of grammar: these are the metaphors though which subterranean, fugitive experiences of strangeness within cultural configurations might disrupt those persistent economies of grammar, moral order, and self-identity. (215)

The writings of Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard abound with similar metaphors which "might disrupt those persistent economies" of order and identity. In Arctic Dreams we read of the defiant horned lark on the tundra, the seal under the drilling platform who stares at Lopez, the right whale who calmly pushes the *Cumbrian* backwards, the swimming polar bear who might hunt Lopez and his companions. All embody the fundamental irreducibility and strangeness of the Other.

In Desert Solitaire, Abbey finds the desert often as "strange" and threatening, or frankly indifferent, as the eye of the crocodile:

I understand for a moment the dread which many feel in the presence of the primeval desert, the unconscious fear which compels them to tame, alter or destroy what they cannot understand, to reduce the wild and prehuman to human dimensions. Anything rather than confront directly the ante-human, that *other world* which frightens not through danger or hostility but in something far worse-- its implacable indifference. (191)

Abbey feels that "[w]hether we live or die is a matter of absolutely no concern to the desert" (267). Abbey embraces and advocates the same cultivation of "strangeness" as Connolly: Abbey celebrates the fact that even after "years of intimate contact and search this quality of strangeness in the desert remains undiminished" (242).

Dillard too cultivates "strangeness." She revels in it. From the smallest organisms she

views through her microscope to the land itself, the world disturbs and startles Dillard, surprising her because she refuses to rely on those "persistent economies" which might stabilize and familiarize the world which is always unsettling, beautiful, and new. Like the politically destabilizing implications of "subterranean voices" and "fugitive experiences of strangeness" brought about by what Laclau and Mouffe call the diverse "new social movements"--"urban, ecological, anti-authoritarian, anti-institutional, feminist, anti-racist, ethnic, regional or that of excluded sexual minorities" (159)-- these nature writers' descriptions of a "fundamentally mysterious" world contest "established closures": those discourses which seek to limit the world, to strip it of its dignity and direct any scheme against (Arctic Dreams 401).

Alongside the fundamental irreducibility of fantasy or identity, both individual and social, lies another "fundamental": the impossibility of a closed, finite democracy. Žižek writes, it is not sufficient to say that "pure" democracy is not possible: the crucial point is where we locate this impossibility. "Pure" democracy is not impossible because of some empirical inertia that prevents its full realization but which may be gradually abolished by democracy's further development; rather, democracy is possible only on the *basis* of its own impossibility; its limit, the irreducible 'pathological' remainder, is its positive condition. (Looking 166)

Žižek describes the "fetishistic split" between the knowledge that democracy will always be "stained" by the irreducibility of its subjects' fantasies and acting "as if democracy were possible" (168). This split is not democracy's fatal flaw but its strength: "democracy is able to take cognizance of the fact that its limit lies in itself, in its internal 'antagonism.'" This is why it can avoid the fate of 'totalitarianism'" (168). The "particular absolute" of fantasy, that which is both

contingent and unsymbolizable, cannot be "emptied out" by the creation of the abstract "democratic subject." The particulars return to stain the subject and to maintain antagonisms between subjects of a democracy. Žižek calls for us to "assume this constitutive paradox of democracy" (168), to pursue democracy just as we pursue the *objet a* even when we come to recognize the impossibility of its ever fulfilling us. To cede our desire here would be to succumb to the "totalitarian temptation" to create a closed system "condemned ceaselessly to invent external 'enemies' to account for its failures" (168).

Chantal Mouffe also suggests that "a project of radical and plural democracy recognizes the impossibility of the complete realization of democracy" (Dimensions 238). There is a permanent tension between the private individual and the abstracted citizen, between liberty and equality. Enhancing and protecting this tension and the "indeterminacy and undecidability which is constitutive of modern democracy," is the "principal guarantee against any attempt to realize a final closure that would result in the elimination of the political and the negation of democracy" (13). Writing with Ernesto Laclau, Mouffe argues that "[t]his moment of tension, of openness, which gives the social its essentially incomplete and precarious character, is what every project for radical democracy should set out to institutionalize" (Laclau and Mouffe 190). Laclau and Mouffe do argue for hegemonic articulations, for along with the dangers of totalitarianism, which "imposes immutable articulations in an authoritarian manner" (188), there is also a threat of a "lack of all reference" to a common point, a horizon, or a "social fabric" (188). Their radical democracy recognizes the "multiplicity of social logics" along with the necessity of unifying certain political spaces through "hegemonic articulations," partially fixing the meaning of elements in the social. Every articulation, however, must be "constantly re-

created and renegotiated, and there is no final point at which a balance will be definitively achieved" (188).

Though the world makes every articulation contingent, Laclau and Mouffe recognize that the "logic of openness and of the democratic subversion of differences" creates the possibility of a totalitarian attempt to establish a centre and to suture over and deny the "radically open character of the social" (186-7). It is therefore incumbent to maintain the tensions in the social and to fully accept the *impossibility* of full realization of democracy and to regard it as a "partial limiting of disorder; of a 'meaning' which is constructed only as excess and paradox in the face of meaninglessness" (193).

As with Žižek, Laclau and Mouffe, Rorty couples his ideas concerning the irreducibility of the "little things" around which we structure our fantasies and out of which are born new descriptions with the fundamental contingency of the social and the impossibility of a closed, finite, democratic utopia. In Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity, Rorty's first three chapters argue the contingency of language, selfhood, and liberal community. Of the latter he writes, "the citizens of my liberal utopia would be people who had a sense of the contingency of their language of moral deliberation, and thus of their consciences, and thus of their community" (61). Mouffedescribes a tension between liberty and equality; Rorty argues that we must treat "the demands of self-creation and of human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable" (xv). In "Feminism and Pragmatism," he suggests that "[f]eminists who are also pragmatists will not see the formation of [a new society] as the removal of social constructs and the restoration of the way things were meant to be. They will see it as the production of a better set of social constructs than the ones presently available" (140). This production is achieved through "the

imaginative ability to see strange people as fellow sufferers" and demands "detailed description of what unfamiliar people are like" and "redescription of what we ourselves are" (Contingency xvi).

This imaginative ability to recognize others in their difference, described by both Frye and Rorty as inseparable from courage, follows from the ability to face up to the contingencies of language, selfhood, and community. It is the "incurious" who, failing to notice the suffering of others, are obsessed with "general ideas" (166) rather than the particulars, the "little things" around which people structure their lives, the "new descriptions" of the world in new vocabularies. The path of the incurious is towards totalitarianism. Against the incurious is the imagination and courage of those "ironists" who "regard the realization of utopias, and the envisaging of still further utopias, as an *endless process*--an endless, proliferating realization of Freedom, rather than a convergence toward an already existing Truth" (xvi, my emphasis). There is no final utopia. There is at best "an endless process" of description kept open by the curious and courageous.

William Connolly also describes the impossibility of finite democratic politics, even his own critical pluralism. In Identity/Difference, Connolly addresses the "two problems of evil" (ix). On a sacred level the first problem involves human efforts to "save the benevolence of an omnipotent god by exempting that god from responsibility for evil" (ix). On a political level, it involves efforts to protect the certainty of a "hegemonic identity" by defining "those differences that pose the greatest threat to the integrity and certainty of that identity" as sites of evil (ix). Much like Žižek's idea that totalitarianism must ceaselessly invent external "enemies to account for its failures," Connolly writes that the second problem is "the evil that flows from the attempt

to establish security of identity for any individual or group by defining the Other that exposes sore spots in one's identity as evil or irrational" (8). The "biggest impetus to fragmentation, violence, and anarchy," Connolly suggests, arises from "totalistic identities engaged in implacable struggles against those differences that threaten their hegemony or exclusivity" (Ethos xxii). In Arctic Dreams, Lopez describes "the exaggerated presence of threat, hidden enemies" around an Alaskan pump station he visits (396). He tells us of the "discreet request by industry that scientific consultants structure environmental data in a helpful way" (357). In the first case the oil company seems to be manufacturing the evil opposition Connolly describes as the first evil. The "discreet requests" of the latter example must be described as the second problem: "the evil that flows from the attempt to establish security of identity." It is an attempt to close the gap between totalistic identities and the whirlwind. Responding to this second problem involves challenging all forms of identity, democracy, order, and "the discourse through which solutions to the first problem are sustained" (Identity x). These identities and discourses attempt to overcome the fundamental paradox of democracy: those stains of particularity making formal democracy impossible. Connolly sums up: "the urge to transcend paradox may be one of the drives concealing the second problem of evil" (x).

Connolly believes that challenging the attempts to "transcend paradox" involves the political contestation of closures and of the "institutionalization of established assumptions" ("Voices" 222). This "contestation" is achieved through critical responsiveness to the "strangeness" within ourselves and others, individuals or groups. It is this strangeness which lies at the heart of the paradox of democracy:

What if strangeness were treated by more people as indispensable to identity in a

world without intrinsic moral design, and, hence, something to be prized as a precondition of identity and a source of possibilities for selective alliances and more generous negotiations with others? And what if more adherents of an intrinsic moral order were to acknowledge the deep and persistent contestability of this projection (along with those that oppose it) so as to allow this issue to become a more overt object of political negotiation and contestations? (220-1)

Recognizing the indispensability of strangeness is recognizing the impossibility of a closed, finite democratic politics, and the impossibility of Connolly's own critical pluralism as a finite system: "Critical pluralism is best presented, then, as a valuable cultural impossibility always susceptible to new possibilities of political operationalization. It is not a sufficient political ideal, but an indispensable component in an admirable ethic of politics" (222). It is an *infinite* process of contesting identities and dogmatism as well as recognizing and cultivating the fundamental strangeness--"whirlwinds"-- within individuals, as much as within groups. Extended to the land, to the world, this process of contestation and cultivation is very the "attitude of regard" found in the writing of Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard. Approaching the land with desire, trying to identify and comprehend, being alert to the fundamental mystery which renders the world uncanny, this is an "admirable ethic" which is "always susceptible to new possibilities."

I quoted Douglas Todd at the opening of this chapter stating that, for Lopez, "Love seems to offer the link that could tie together his ever-evolving, Earth-revering worldview" (200-1). Lopez describes love as an "obligation" in Arctic Dreams: "to approach with an uncalculating mind, with an attitude of regard" (228). It is a "respectful attitude towards a mystery" (140); it is an attitude of paradox: I love you, I am trying to learn everything about you, I can never know

you. It is recognizing the becoming of the Other, the endless change in the particulars, the impossibility of full knowing, complete comprehension. It is maddening and ethical.

This attitude is shared and informed by postmodern science which is concerned with external and internal relations within the flux of the material universe. It denies the division of subject and object and argues against any notion of "final closure" in understanding the world. Postmodern science seeks to "reenchant" the world, to approach it less as an object to be analysed and broken down into its constituent parts and more as a whole which contains us. It seeks to know without the arrogance of closed, finite. Postmodern science allows us, as Lopez writes, "to preserve some of the mystery" (*Arctic Dreams* 228) in the world and, at the same time, reveals to us greater mysteries than we could have imagined.

The American philosophical tradition of pragmatism, as it forms the basis for environmental pragmatism, adopts a similar loving attitude towards the world. Pragmatism follows the same paradoxical movement of seeking knowledge through experience while recognizing that our understanding is always fallible and incomplete. Holding experience to be the source of any growth, Kelly A. Parker writes, "the very idea that the environment funds experience involves the notion that there is an ineffable aspect to the world" (30). Like the nature writers, describing the world as mysterious, strange, and startling, the environmental pragmatists hold that the world is a fount of unknown possibilities. We are in the world, of the world, and internally related to the world. Environmental pragmatism argues for preservation of the diversity of the world, the source of our experiences and thus our growth.

Ecofeminists Warren and Plumwood both use the term "love" to describe a sustainable, ethical, and reoriented attitude towards the world. Environmental feminism argues that there are

critical connections between the domination of women and the domination of nature. It seeks to expose the patriarchal logic of domination that frames our understanding of the world. It is a logic which Warren argues maintains identities and works to "establish inferiority and justify subordination" (21). This logic determines not only the subjugation of women to men, but of people of colour to whites, indigenous peoples to colonizers, the natural world to human beings. And like the ecofeminists, the nature writers foreground the flawed logic which assumes a finite, reducible world, subordinated to human desires. They argue for a love which would allow for differences without dualisms and hierarchies. They seek to disturb, even shatter, our complacency with the dominant place in the world we imagine we occupy and to encourage the humility that comes with love.

In writing about radical democracy, there is a temptation to let our minds wander to the fantastic idea of extending the franchise to the non-human, to somehow create a true, universal democracy of all living things. Of *all* things. The idea falls short in the face of the impossibility of drawing a line between democratic subjects and everything else. But formal democracy itself is also impossible since every democratic subject is stained by particularity: the subject cannot be abstracted without a remainder. Every subject is stained by particularity which cannot be adequately symbolized. Every subject is ultimately irreducible to the democratic subject.

Radical democracy, in arguing for the recognition of irreducible differences among people and the impossibility of a finite democratic system, points us towards the understanding of the world found in Lopez, Abbey, and Dillard. Lopez argues that we need a "more particularized understanding of the land itself . . . a deeper understanding of its nature, as if it were, itself, another sort of civilization we had to reach some agreement with" (Arctic Dreams

12). William Connolly's notion of "attentiveness to whirlwinds within and without" (221) brings radical democracy and nature writing together in that it not only makes us consider those irreducible differences among people, but it makes us consider the strangeness of the natural world itself. Like the whirlwind, the eye of the crocodile is not only a metaphor for human difference. It is the gaze of an indifferent world beyond our comprehension, worthy of our fear and love.

And just as radical democracy can inform our attitude towards the natural world, nature writing can inform our attitude towards the human social world. Lopez calls nature writing a "literature of hope" and writes:

I suppose this is a conceit, but I believe this area of writing [nature writing] will not only produce a major and lasting body of American literature, but that it might also provide the foundation for the reorganization of American political thought.

("Natural" 297)

Reading Arctic Dreams, Desert Solitaire, and Pilgrim at Tinker Creek forces us to confront the uncanniness of the world. It is not, nor can it ever be, just as we thought. The world cannot be adequately symbolized; it does not conform to the fantasies which orient our desires. Something is "always amiss" and undiminished. Something looms in the gap between the world and our desire, ready to alter our very reality. Lopez tell us that "the land retains an identity of its own, still deeper and more subtle than we can know" (228). This mystery then is the foundation for the "reorganization" of which Lopez writes. He hopes for political thought which recognizes the dignity of groups and individuals beyond that conferred by any identity constructed by others. This attitude of regard would cultivate and respect the "fundamental mystery" in people and the

diverse elements of their environment as "something sacred."

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