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## Narrating Rewilding: Shifting Images of Wilderness in American Literature

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NARRATING REWILDING:  
SHIFTING IMAGES OF WILDERNESS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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DISSERTATION

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the  
College of Arts and Sciences  
at the University of Kentucky

By

Aaron Andrew Cloyd

Lexington, Kentucky

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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### NARRATING REWILDING: SHIFTING IMAGES OF WILDERNESS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

*Narrating Rewilding* analyzes interactions between imaginative writings and environmental histories to ask how novels and creative nonfiction contribute to conversations of wilderness rewilding. I identify aspects of rewilding in Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses*, Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping*, and Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge* within a context of William Cronon's and James Feldman's works of environmental history, and I argue that the selected imaginative works offer alternative ramifications of rewilding by questioning Cronon's and Feldman's anthropocentric basis.

While Cronon and Feldman argue that a rewilding wilderness expresses interconnections between human history and expressions of nature, and that a return of wild aspects benefits human understanding and interaction within wilderness areas, in these imaginative writings, wildernesses are sites that flatten hierarchies between natural elements and human aspects, places where characters languish. They are lands deeply layered with both natural and cultural histories, but aspects of the past often remain beyond reach. Rewilding in these wildernesses equates with damage and loss.

Taken together, I argue that these narratives of wilderness rewilding augment one another, creating a dialog where Cronon's and Feldman's discourses of environmental recovery and of human gain inform corresponding imaginative writings but are also challenged by models of lament and loss. This restructured approach to wilderness rewilding offers a widened range of potential responses to an ever-changing, ever-rewilding wilderness.

**KEYWORDS:** American Literature, Wilderness, Rewilding, Environmental Writing, Ecocriticism

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NARRATING REWILDING:  
SHIFTING IMAGES OF WILDERNESS IN AMERICAN LITERATURE

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DEDICATION

For Lisa – my love, my heart

For Nathaniel – my joy

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction: Reweaving Wilderness Rewilding**

Oak trees define parking regulations on Stone Avenue in Lexington, Kentucky. Most mornings I pass this arborescent colonnade on my walk to the University, undulating over pieces of sidewalk that roots have puckered along the seams. From the narrow strip of land between road and sidewalk, broad trunks give way to intricate branches that, when in leaf, shade concrete and plant alike, and when bare, trace lines across sky and building. Bolted into each tree: rusting signs – “no parking” – which are as much bark as metal, for the trees appear determined to make the words and paint part of themselves as they grow over and around inscriptions of civic expectations.

I envision this row of trees as a site of active confluence more than a fixed line of boundary. Natural processes of photosynthesis and regeneration in these oaks play out simultaneously with cultural practices of pruning and posting of parking policies. Such a place is a process rather than a static entity. The growing and adapting trees modify and emphasize the decay of the signs (chipping paint and rusting metal), while the presence of sheet metal and bolts alters my understanding of the trees.

Like ivy creeping across brick buildings or flowers sprouting from sidewalk cracks, the interconnections between sign and tree imply beauty, an attraction to some new and yet old thing. Perhaps these trees and their signs draw my attention as Lexington’s version of ancient ruins where observers may connect to peoples and histories of the past, where physical objects stretch a sense of time to include more than the present, where something outside the immediate suggests the durable or even transcendent. Perhaps the enfolding bark prompts experiences of the sublime as an unsettling yet welcome reminder of what exists beyond and outside the bounds of

humanity. In this fashion, perhaps my response is something akin to a wilderness experience.

I recognize that I could and perhaps even should view the trees as scarred, as cut by metal signs and punctured by bolts. I could mourn the signs as yet another instance of nature's devastation by an invasive humanity bent on placing its stamp of existence in the world around them. Yet I am equally drawn to the bark that enfolds and envelops the parking signs. My interest is also piqued by what could be construed as a resilient nature taking over and redefining histories of human desires and decisions; I could read the bark as a return of something previously modified or diminished. Rather than separate these responses, I might draw from environmental historians and their concept of rewilding to hold these interpretations together.

My posture or attitude toward these trees and signs likely derives from a complex aggregate of multiple sources. Perhaps I walk by and see beyond these signs much as I hiked or skied around and over sagging barbed wire fences and rusting "no trespassing" signs as a youth in search of back country rivers and rocky cliffs throughout southern Wyoming. Perhaps my attraction to the enveloping bark harkens back to my playful celebration over spring floods along the North Platte River that pushed water over roads and old bridge supports. My reaction likewise represents an extension of the many late twentieth-century American literary works that I study and teach in which natural environments – particularly wildernesses – are sites that bear signs of human culture, where both a sense of nature and culture remain at play as cultural traces are often fading, giving way to a returning of aspects considered wild nature, but a nature that is now imprinted by human culture and history.

## Imaging Wilderness Interactions

My walk down Stone Avenue and my ensuing response points up significant questions often asked of contemporary experiences with nature: how do we make sense of nature<sup>1</sup> that intertwines with and is deeply informed by aspects of human<sup>2</sup> culture, and how might we interpret the inscriptions of humanity that exist within sites deemed natural? These are old questions that have been posed by public leaders and authors from William Bradford to Edward Abbey to Annie Dillard. For Bradford, the forests and hills surrounding seventeenth-century Plymouth were “fall [sic] of wild beasts and wild men,” and he therefore explained his surroundings as a “hideous and desolate wilderness” (62). Rather than repulsion, Abbey images wilderness as a site of renewal by insisting that a sense of nature remains intact outside and beyond the human influence he witnessed while working as a park ranger in Arches National Monument, Utah in the 1950s. Abbey saw a landscape modified by roads, hiking trails, and dam projects, but he argues that nature exceeds culture in such a way that even his writing cannot “get the desert into a book” (x). Compared to Abbey, Dillard creates less space between nature and culture as she observes wildlife at Tinker Creek in sight of fences and cattle pastures or when she experiences different levels of consciousness staring at mountains in Virginia from a gas station.

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<sup>1</sup> As Raymond Williams writes, “nature is perhaps the most complex word in the language,” for the word bears at least three connotations: the “essential quality and character of something,” the “inherent force which directs either the world or human beings, or both,” and the “material world itself, taken as including nor not including human beings” (219). Throughout this project, “nature” primarily references Williams’s third meaning: the “material world” and attends to the presence or place of human beings within that space. <sup>2</sup> Like nature, “humanity” and “human” bear complex meanings. As Bernard Williams writes, humanity is a “name not merely for a species but for a quality” (22). I would prefer to make “quality” plural and thereby view humanity as a set of shifting attributes rather than a singular and set characteristic. While this project recognizes the conditional nature of terms like humanity and human, both are used in this project to primarily reference a source or a cause. To state that a particular place bears products of humanity, therefore, is to reference from where those products derived from rather than to argue for the makeup or constitution of that humanity.

A current response to these questions by environmental historians and one that particularly addresses wilderness areas, goes by the name of “rewilding” and is best exemplified by William Cronon in his 2003 article “The Riddle of the Apostle Islands” and by James Feldman in his 2011 book *A Storied Wilderness* (which originated in his 2004 dissertation, *Rewilding the Islands*, under Cronon’s direction). According to Feldman, rewilding is a return of wild nature in places of previous human habitation and work, but such landscapes “should be interpreted as evidence neither of past human abuse nor of triumphant wild nature, but as examples of the ongoing impact of human choices on natural processes and of natural conditions on human history” (9). As with Bradford, Abbey, and Dillard, rewilding is a narrative that defines wilderness places by challenging previously held conceptions with the aim of reimagining such sites,<sup>3</sup> or as Cronon writes in a different context, in his 1995 essay “The Trouble with Wilderness, or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” “The time has come to rethink wilderness” (69).<sup>4</sup>

This time to rethink wilderness has arrived, contends Cronon, due to current ecological challenges, because the earth’s environment is now undeniably defined and modified by humanity. According to many ecological commentators, we have now entered the “Anthropocene,” a new era of history defined by the widespread presence and influence of humanity on earth’s environments. In this context, from Cronon’s

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<sup>3</sup> My wording here is inspired by geographer David Harvey’s work. I originally discovered Harvey in Lawrence Buell’s chapter, “Space, Place, and Imagination from Local to Global,” in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*. For Harvey, see his work, *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

<sup>4</sup> Cronon’s work has long been defined by his interest in reconsidering or rethinking landscapes by analyzing interconnections between nature and culture. His first book, *Changes in the Land*, traces the “fundamental reorganizations” of New England “plant and animal communities” in the “shift from Indian to European dominance” (vii). His second book, *Nature’s Metropolis*, similarly argues that “no city played a more important role in shaping the landscape and economy of the midcontinent during the second half of the nineteenth-century than Chicago” (xv). His essay “The Trouble with Wilderness” and his article on rewilding can be read as extensions of this earlier work. Given its focus on wilderness, this dissertation evokes Cronon by way of these later essays but recognizes that Cronon’s work with wilderness definition and history reflects his broader interest in interconnections between nature and culture.

perspective, we can no longer pretend that wilderness is a “pristine sanctuary where the last remnant of an untouched, endangered, but still transcendent nature can for at least a little while longer be encountered without the contaminating taint of civilization” (“Trouble” 69).<sup>5</sup> To perpetuate these images of wilderness is to undercut environmental action, according to Cronon, for the “trouble” with such portrayals is that privilege apparently pristine sites while neglecting places that evince more overt marks of human influence (86).

Cronon traces these portrayals of wilderness to the stories we have told – and continue to tell – about wilderness. He points to narratives from Henry David Thoreau to John Muir to Owen Wister that depict wilderness as sublimely divine, a type of Eden, a prelapsarian locale removed from a despoiling presence of humanity. Cronon implies that the time has come to tell different and new stories about wilderness, narratives that account for human histories and influences in wilderness, which will in turn allow us to understand wilderness as a site of interaction and sustainable relationships between nature and humanity.

Cronon’s and Feldman’s arguments of rewilding rethink – and retell – wilderness in two fashions. One, they contest the dichotomization of wilderness and culture and contend that to ignore human influences in a given wilderness site is to hinder understanding of that landscape’s past as well as its current conditions. As Feldman argues, rewilding wildernesses “represent both history and nature, working

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<sup>5</sup> Wilderness, of course, has never been an “untouched” or “pristine” site. The environment encountered by Puritan colonists had long been influenced by Native American farming and hunting practices. Cronon’s point that “the time has come” could appear anachronistic, but I understand his comments in light of current environmental challenges, which have become more pronounced and recognized in a contemporary setting. My adaptation of his contention about this “time” likewise recognizes the amassing of present environmental issues and their influence on wilderness.

simultaneously and together” (9). Two, they assert that human influence in an environment does not necessarily diminish the quality of wilderness or human experiences in those sites. “Recognizing the history” of wilderness areas “does not detract from their value. Rather, it deepens and enriches this value,” writes Feldman (223).

For Cronon and Feldman, “value” bears multiple connotations. As they highlight the return of aspects deemed natural and wild, they accentuate central values of wildness: that such aspects and locations endure and are self-perpetuating. In interpreting current landscapes through a lens of previous interactions between humanity and land, Cronon and Feldman indicate historical value as previous eras become more significant for current understanding, which, in turn, implies an educational value of rewilding wilderness: sites such as the Apostle Islands offer case studies to guide discussions of wilderness definition and management. By “value,” therefore, Cronon and Feldman gesture toward ecological health while also implying benefits for human gain and welfare.

In addition to upholding values of human knowledge and understanding, Cronon and Feldman also emphasize a link between a rewilding wilderness and human emotional and psychological well-being. By arguing that human history and habitation do not interrupt or diminish a wilderness experience, Cronon and Feldman uphold and perpetuate a pattern of emotional values and responses frequently linked with wilderness: awareness, revelation, elation, wonder, and intrigue. Cronon particularly underscores hope. By considering a return of wild nature in wilderness sites that exhibit “extensive human modification,” Cronon argues that narratives of rewilding “should be taken as a

tale of hope” (“Foreword” xii).<sup>6</sup> While this connection between written texts and emotional responses to physical environments by readers might be contested, if paired with Kenneth Burke’s idea of attitudes as “incipient action” – the work of narratives to arouse attitudes and stage future responses – Cronon and Feldman’s “restorying” of wilderness might be understood as a conditioning of emotional and physical response, a setting in motion of tendencies that support subsequent actions (236). By casting a rewilding wilderness as a resource for human betterment, rewilding narratives such as Cronon’s and Feldman’s script and order corresponding expectations and stage related future actions.

This attention toward human needs and benefits links Cronon’s and Feldman’s narratives to what Michael Nelson and John Vucetich identify as an anthropocentric argument for wilderness, a position which implies that wilderness exists primarily for human advantage (1577).<sup>7</sup> An anthropocentric stance foregrounds the presence and needs of humanity while backgrounding the value and distinctness of other forms of life. Such a position can be solipsistic, as Val Plumwood observes (672), especially when nature is reduced to a form of culture, as when Cronon argues that “there is nothing natural about the concept of wilderness,” for it is “invented” and “constructed” by human culture (“Trouble” 79-80). Anthropocentrism also implies a hierarchy where the desires and wants of humanity are elevated above, and served by, other expressions of life.

Viewed from another angle, the arguments of Cronon’s and Feldman’s rewilding risk an

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<sup>6</sup> In this phrase, Cronon sounds much like Wallace Stegner in his 1960 Wilderness Letter. Stegner ends the letter by contending that wilderness is a “geography of hope” (333). Although both Cronon and Stegner use “hope” to mean a reassurance for humanity’s future, the two men wrote in different contexts. While Stegner wrote of a hope deriving from a preservation of current wilderness sites, Cronon writes of hope within a context of a potential return of wilderness-like conditions.

<sup>7</sup> Nelson and Vucetich identify 31 arguments for wilderness or reasons why wilderness is valued. This work has most recently appeared as an article in *The International Encyclopedia of Ethics*, but the categories were originally set out by Nelson in a 1998, in *The Great New Wilderness Debate*.

association with a version of environmental utilitarianism, which views wilderness as a resource to be accessed and appropriated for the benefit of humanity.

I concur with Cronon and Feldman that the time has come to rethink wilderness, and I agree that such reconsiderations are the province of narratives.<sup>8</sup> But I question the retained emphasis on human gain, and I also seek to expand a conversation about rewilding to also include imaginative, creative works. This dissertation argues that discussions in environmental history and the related narratives are not the only available responses to rewilding wilderness sites. Imaginative works throughout late twentieth-century American literature conceive of a wilderness where a sense of wild nature is returning, where wilderness sites bear histories of humanity, and where aspects of nature and culture intertwine to define current conditions. Taken together, such works suggest and structure a range of incipient actions, potential responses to contemporary wilderness places. To identify and analyze particular expressions across this range is the work of this dissertation. The literary responses are many, but I recognize three points or segments along this range and discuss three texts as representations of those points: Cormac McCarthy's novel *All the Pretty Horses*, Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping*, and Terry Tempest Williams's memoir *Refuge*.

Situated across a range of potential responses to rewilding wildernesses, I read these texts as interacting with ideas of rewilding in two distinct but related fashions. First, these narratives echo but challenge Cronon and Feldman's definition of wilderness as a site of human history and work. In some instances, trails and fences mark humanity's

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<sup>8</sup> My point here echoes Glen Love's argument: "The most important function of literature today is to redirect human consciousness to a full consideration of its place in a threatened natural world," but I prefer "response" to his term, "place," and I perceive a range of such responses while Love's contention implies a singular stance (213).

presence, while in other cases, cultural efforts to recreate wilderness highlight human interactions. Throughout all the narratives considered here, interpretations of land by characters undergird and signify wilderness as a site of interaction with human culture as well. Yet each text complicates ideas of rewilding and works toward qualifying potential ends of such narratives. If rewilding constitutes a reconstruction of wilderness, the narratives analyzed here question the relationship of wilderness to aspects of human benefit and welfare. An epistemological critique is also present, as these narratives consider how a juxtaposition of nature and humanity affects acts of interpretation and access to previous knowledge.

Two, these texts indicate a range of human reactions to rewilding wildernesses. Characters yearn for renewal and hope but settle for trivial imitations of these experiences when redefined and reconstructed wildernesses prove unable to match their expectations. Transience and displacement, melancholy and mourning are experienced as sites of rewilding occlude desires to access some deeper form of life; characters emerge from wilderness diminished and diseased, questioning their existence. At times, processes of rewilding remove individuals from wilderness rather than support additional contact. Such reactions and experiences suggest that a rewilding wilderness is something more complex than a resource for human gain, and these texts imply the need to supplement the often-anthropocentric stance inherent in arguments of rewilding. As Michael Nelson observes, many contemporary arguments for wilderness attempt to move beyond the “narrowly instrumental, egocentric, and anthropocentric values” of wilderness (“Amalgamation” 155). The imaginative works analyzed in this dissertation provide one basis to support such a move.

## Uses of “Rewilding”

William Cronon and James Feldman are not alone in their use of the term “rewilding.” Jennifer Foote first used “rewild” in a 1990 *Newsweek* article to describe the actions and aims of Earth First!, an environmental advocacy group. Michael Soulè and Reed Noss reinforced these original associations between activism and rewilding in their influential 1998 article “Rewilding and Biodiversity,” and the widespread environmental work of Dave Foreman, along with his creation of The Rewilding Institute in 2003, has similarly linked rewilding to ecological advocacy. When referenced in these contexts, rewilding designates the restoration of sizeable, interconnected tracts of land in the effort to support a reintroduction of large predators.<sup>9</sup>

From these original contexts and specific instances of definition, authors and scholars in various fields of study have modified the term rewilding to match their own purposes. A 2001 anthology, *Wilderness Comes Home: Rewilding the Northeast*, focuses more on the rewilding of land than on the reintroduction of large animal species.<sup>10</sup> Foreman’s North American focus, in his 2004 book *Rewilding North America*, is narrowed by Richard Manning in his 2009 work *Rewilding the West*, in which he considers the potential restoration of prairie in northern Montana, while Caroline Fraser widens Foreman’s scope to discuss rewilding within a global context in her 2009 book *Rewilding the World*. This brief sketch evinces two understandings of rewilding, which

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<sup>9</sup> This approach is often referenced as the “three C’s: cores, corridors, and carnivores,” with cores meaning large land reserves, corridors signifying the connection of those reserves, and carnivores referencing “keystone species” (Soulè and Noss 5).

<sup>10</sup> As indicated in their “three C’s” agenda, Soulè, Noss, and Foreman do attend to the rewilding of land, but my distinction here is one of order and emphasis, means and ends. Soulè, Noss, and Foreman contend that “large predators are often instrumental in maintaining the integrity of ecosystems” (“Rewilding” 5) while many essays in the *Wilderness Comes Home* anthology accentuate the construction of rewilding landscapes in order to support keystone species.

represent and are derived from differing definitions of wilderness. The distinctions are not absolute, but the understandings diverge in regards to ideas of humanity and time.

In terms of humanity, Soulè, Noss, and Foreman equate wilderness with the Pleistocene, an era of minimal human presence and influence on the earth's environment, and thereby perceive wilderness in opposition to human civilization. The actions and histories of humanity within wilderness are equated with "wounds" and "ecological insults" that must be reversed and repaired (Soulè and Noss 7). If a human presence is required for the reintroduction of carnivores, it is to be "temporary" (7). While Cronon and Feldman note that human actions have irreparably damaged particular environments, they emphasize that current wilderness conditions are partially the product of human history. To experience wilderness, according to Cronon and Feldman, is to witness an intertwining between nature and humanity.

Regarding time, Manning and Fraser work within the approach of Soulè, Noss, and Foreman, emphasizing what must be done and looking primarily toward future expressions of restoration, while the *Wilderness Comes Home* anthology represents more of an explanation of what has already occurred. Nora Mitchell and Rolf Diamant's essay, for instance, describes the nineteenth-century reforestation of Mount Tom in Vermont. Cronon's and Feldman's account of the Apostle Islands is a more recent example of the mode of rewilding at work in the *Wilderness Comes Home* anthology. To interpret the wilderness areas throughout the Apostle Islands, Cronon and Feldman trace the transition of the islands from a site of logging, quarrying, and fishing to a designated wilderness area and explain the various processes at work in the regeneration of forests, plant species, and animals throughout the twenty-two islands.

This is not to say that history does not inform the views of Soulè, Noss, and Foreman, and these distinctions do not imply that Cronon and Feldman are unconcerned with future conditions of wilderness. Soulè, Noss, and Foreman look back to the Pleistocene to inform their future actions, and Cronon and Feldman work toward understanding how previous conditions inform future management of wilderness. The distinctions represent emphasis: Soulè, Noss, and Foreman focus their energies on creating a future wilderness while Cronon and Feldman direct their work toward examining the histories of particular places.

These differing emphases often raise contentious divides between activists like Foreman and environmental historians like Cronon in contexts of reconstructive efforts. As Dolly Jørgensen argues in a recent podcast interview, environmental history is “not interested in reconstructing the environment as it was” but is more focused on reconstructing the “relationship between humans and the nonhuman” and understanding how those interactions inform current and future environmental conditions. Foreman sharply criticizes this emphasis on what he calls the “received wilderness idea” and the reading of wilderness and rewilding as socially-constructed processes in his essay “The Real Wilderness Idea,” in which he draws a distinction between “deconstructionist scholars,” such as Cronon, who are interested only in “abstract ideas,” and the wilderness ideas that are “on the ground” and that lead to actual conservationist action (378-381).

This dissertation enters into these contexts of rewilding by expanding the purview of rewilding, by considering how it functions in selected imaginative works throughout late twentieth-century American literature. Yet recognizing that significant distinctions occur between different expressions of rewilding conversations, this present study of

rewilding narratives primarily responds to Cronon and Feldman because of a shared content and emphasis. The literary works in this dissertation, in other words, do not postulate how a rewilded wilderness of the future would best be constructed; rather, these works correspond more with Cronon and Feldman, as their respective authors strive to interpret and understand expressions of culture and nature interacting within present rewilding wildernesses.

### **Semantics and Modes of Rewilding**

For Cronon and Feldman, rewilding is a process and a concept. It is a way to describe “places where wild nature has returned after long periods of intensive human use” (Feldman 9), and it is an “interpretive framework” that integrates “natural and cultural resources (Cronon “Riddle” 41). As an adjective, it describes a type of place: “rewilding landscapes” (Feldman 9). As a verb, it depicts development or change, as when Feldman, in describing different sites of rewilding, writes, “These places, each rewilding in its own way . . .” (21). This dissertation reflects these connotations and uses of rewilding, but it also takes rewilding as a subject or object of study. Rewilding is understood in this project as a structure of thought, as an approach to describing and understanding interrelations between culture and nature, and as an attitude, interpretation, and argument about sites of wilderness.

To discuss rewilding as a structure of thought or approach is to enter into conversation with particular narrative types, modes, or scenarios, although a sublevel of some broader category of writing would likely be most accurate, placing what I call “narratives of rewilding” within the province of wilderness writing. Ann Ronald traces

the development of wilderness writing to Henry David Thoreau and John Muir and argues that this type of writing addresses “man’s relationship to any environment largely untouched by men” (7). Although Ronald complicates this claim, working through its paradoxes, her primary point remains: wilderness writing involves a setting that is cast as pristine, even if that portrayal is in perception alone. Narratives of rewilding function within wilderness writing but shift this premise; the setting remains identifiable as wilderness, yet the perception of the pristine is replaced with an overt acknowledgement that wilderness is a place handled and marked by humanity.

A shift in this premise bears multiple ramifications, and the first work of this dissertation consists of attending to images of rewilding wildernesses in select imaginative works from late twentieth-century American literature to analyze how such sites are presented and defined. Each chapter, in other words, emphasizes *how* particular narratological features structure understanding and interpretation of rewilding wilderness places. The project asks how texts attend to, identify, and make visible a wilderness that is understood, not as pristine, but as an interactive process, as a site of human history and habitation, as a constructed and reimagined place.

This approach implies a reshuffling of the narrative features of character, plot, and setting to attend to place. Rather than approach a novel like *All the Pretty Horses* as a work of human relations or as a consideration of events arranged through causality,<sup>11</sup> this dissertation reads for place, and thus implies that imaginative writing represents one juncture where attention might be directed toward rewilding wildernesses, where such

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<sup>11</sup> My wording here echoes E.M. Forster’s definition of plot in *Aspects of the Novel*.

sites might be approached and contemplated.<sup>12</sup> Yet character is not fully excluded here, for this attention toward wilderness is also a study of incipient actions, an examination of how textual presentations of rewilding wildernesses structure human responses.

## **Chapter Outlines**

This project begins by analyzing Cormac McCarthy's novel *All the Pretty Horses* as a text deeply engaged with redefining wilderness. I argue that wilderness redefinition represents a foundational emphasis of rewilding narratives, and the chapter identifies three processes whereby McCarthy's novel contests existing definitions and works toward constructing new frames for understanding wilderness. One, what is ordinarily considered extrinsic to wilderness – human culture – is brought into contact with that which is taken as intrinsic to wilderness – nature. McCarthy's wilderness is a site simultaneously informed by intrinsic values and contextual aspects; his wilderness landscapes and experiences coincide with traces and marks of humanity. Two, within these integrative spaces, McCarthy's narrative assigns significance to a broad range of definitional characteristics, thereby expanding the set of values associated with concepts of wilderness. Abandoned mining equipment, ruins of a former cabin, and remains of previous ranches augment wilderness rather than diminish it. Third, McCarthy's novel shifts away from a hierarchical formulation and moves toward constructing horizontal or rhizomatic relationships. This redefined space flattens hierarchies between natural environments and a human presence but also suggests that a return of nature, a rewilding,

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<sup>12</sup> In his work on contemporary fiction, Robert Eaglestone argues that novels are a “special form of attention” (63), that they “mark a space in which something is held and maintained” (78). While Eaglestone's discussion is primarily concerned with aspects of terror and death, I am extending his idea to also include environmental aspects.

occurs only as human artifacts decompose. As this movement toward decay is reflected in the physical diminishment of the novel's characters, the narrative presents a model for relating to rewilding wilderness that shifts the focal point from humanity to considering how self might be enfolded into the rhythms of an environment.

The redefinitional work of rewilding narratives correlates with a renegotiation and reevaluation of associations between wilderness and history. The ensuing chapter explicates these interactions by juxtaposing Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping* with the rewilding narratives of William Cronon and James Feldman, allowing the different narratives to critique each other and complicate a conversation about wilderness and history. While a Wilderness Act rhetoric often images wilderness as a site without human history, Robinson's, Cronon's, and Feldman's narratives historicize the ahistorical by presenting a rewilding wilderness as a place deeply layered with cultural history and affected by the flow of human events. Wilderness, according to these narratives, is best understood as a place shaped by previous human habitation and actions. For Ruth and Sylvie in Robinson's novel, the remote mountains and "black wilderness" are defined as much by their grandfather's work on the railroad and his orchard as by a sense of isolation created by the land. Similarly, for Cronon and Feldman, the forests and pristine shorelines of the Apostle Islands coincide with lighthouses and rusting farm equipment, with each aspect informing the other. This chapter contends that the staging of these renegotiations reflects a desire to reach beyond what is interpreted as wilderness surfaces into some seemingly deeper meaning to recover that which is deemed lost or obstructed from view by a presence of such surfaces. While all three narratives reproduce these interpretative moves, the chapter ends by positing *Housekeeping* as a text that questions

access and ability to retrieve what may exist beyond or beneath professed wilderness surfaces. Rather than prefer either surface or depth, the novel attends to the interplay between them.

Both of the aforementioned chapters attend to wilderness rewilding as a structure of thought that ramifies in multiple directions. While Cronon and Feldman contemplate beneficial movements of a returning wild nature, the correlated texts examined in this project consider wilderness rewilding as a movement of erasure and as an inaccessible site. A final chapter in this project augments and extends this attention to variant rewilding narratives by analyzing Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge* as a work which dramatizes rewilding damage. For Williams, rewilding occurs as heavy spring runoffs transform city streets into rivers and the usually tame Great Salt Lake rises and expands to reoccupy sites beyond its usual boundaries. These rising waters flood Williams's access point to wilderness locations, of which the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge is the most significant. Countless birds are displaced, extensive damage undermines farming lands and local businesses, and Williams is removed from locations where she previously experienced wilderness. Coinciding with these movements of rewilding, Williams's mother and grandmother are diagnosed with cancer, and their experiences interrelate with Williams's shifting views of her changing surroundings, which she translates as a body buffeted and ravaged by an invasive element. Forced to modify her interaction with wilderness, Williams searches for a new posture that turns her inward, toward emotions and psychological states. The chapter ends by suggesting that Williams's shifting wilderness scripts allow her to witness rewilding anew, to experience a wilderness that is continually expressing a returning wild.

## **Conclusion**

As with the trees on Stone Avenue, sites of wilderness rewilding bear multiple meanings and arouse complex attitudes or postures. The parking signs indicate a presence of humanity, their stamp on and trace in nature. Yet their fading paint and rusting metal indicate a diminishing presence, a gesture toward an absence of humanity that is reinforced through the words “no parking.” Humanity and its vehicles are not welcome in this site and are enjoined to leave. And yet I stand before the trees, present in this place of expectant absence. The signs do not as much erase human presence as offer modified terms for its existence. While there are many possible narratives that could offer interpretation and suggest responses to the oak trees – to sites of rewilding – the narratives examined here enter into a well-developed debate about wilderness, contesting its definitions by suggesting that rewilding wildernesses are sites of humanity, but not necessarily for humanity, and by offering expressions of these altered provisions of human presences. To invoke an image from I.A. Richards, the imaginative works considered in this dissertation act as looms on which to “re-weave” ideas of wilderness rewilding (3).

## **Chapter Two** **(Re)Defining Wilderness in Cormac McCarthy's *All the Pretty Horses***

The word “wilderness” does not appear in Cormac McCarthy’s 1992 novel *All the Pretty Horses*, even though it is set within the deserted regions of southern Texas and northern Mexico. Within these settings, the principal characters, John Grady Cole and Lacy Rawlins, ride south from San Angelo, Texas on horseback in 1949 and are joined by a younger boy, Jimmy Blevins, before the three of them cross the Rio Grande into Coahuila, Mexico. John Grady and Rawlins part ways with Blevins after he loses his horse in a lighting storm, steals it back from its new owner, and must flee from the men attempting to recapture the horse. Riding farther south into Coahuila, John Grady and Rawlins secure employment at a large ranch, but are soon linked with Blevins’s crimes (he has since killed three men) and are eventually imprisoned. A police captain kills Blevins, and after John Grady and Rawlins are released from prison, Rawlins returns to Texas while John Grady remains in Coahuila, attempting but failing to marry his lover, Alejandra. After recovering Blevins’s horse, John Grady returns to Texas, and the novel ends with John Grady riding south again, through the red deserts beyond Iraan, Texas and the Pecos River in an effort to locate an owner for the horse.

As the boys ride across these multiple geographies and encounter disparate forms of landscapes throughout their travels, neither the narrator nor the characters explicitly label any particular site or region as wilderness, nor do the boys ride through any legally defined wilderness areas.<sup>13</sup> Rather, wilderness is present implicitly throughout the novel,

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<sup>13</sup> There are six legally designated wilderness areas in Texas, all of which are in the southeast region of the state. Riding south from San Angelo, Texas, the boys are west of these areas, and their closest proximity to a legally recognized wilderness area occurs as they cross into Coahuila, Mexico and ride east of Madres del Carmen, which was designated in 2005 as Latin America’s first wilderness area. Even if the boys were to

occurring by way of qualities traditionally associated with wilderness such as “wild,” “barren,” and “vacant.” Yet the presence of abandoned ranches, rusting mining equipment, and collapsing cabins in these areas contests these qualities. Such are the grounds for the first argument in this chapter: McCarthy’s novel is at work questioning perceptions of wilderness and offering alternative definitions for these spaces.<sup>14</sup>

A redefinition of wilderness in *All the Pretty Horses* initiates from the presence of human objects: roads, fence posts, windmills, apple trees, and cabins. These objects challenge conceptions of wilderness as a site removed from and purged of human culture: persisting ideas about wilderness legally set down in the 1964 Wilderness Act. Yet these objects are crumbling or rusting, fading into the land around them. Their movement toward decay and the implied reciprocal reinstatement of natural elements indicates that this proposed wilderness is not a static site but a process, a place of attrition and return. This presentation and imaging of wilderness situates the novel in conjunction with a particular expression of wilderness redefinition: narratives of rewilding, and the chapter places McCarthy’s novel in dialog with similar acts of redefinition from Cronon’s and Feldman’s narratives of rewilding.

Yet although *All the Pretty Horses* echoes a principal argument of rewilding narratives – that wilderness requires redefining – it works toward a different import. Hence the second argument of the chapter: McCarthy’s novel resituates a human presence within wilderness. While discourses of rewilding, such as those by William

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ride through and experience these sites, however, “wilderness” would be anachronistic, in a legal sense of the word, as none of these areas were recognized by 1949, the timeframe of the novel.

<sup>14</sup> Andrew Keller Estes argues for a similar reading of the novel, contending that *All the Pretty Horses* constitutes a “debate on the nature of wilderness spaces” (133). His approach differs from mine, in that he contends that McCarthy provides a way to move beyond “utopian and dystopian traditions in the writing of American spaces” while the context in my chapter is focused on definitions ramifying from the Wilderness Act (133).

Cronon and James Feldman, often develop within anthropocentric frames, suggesting that a redefined wilderness remains a resource for human augmentation and gain, McCarthy's novel suggests that a rewilding wilderness is a site of human diminishment and abatement, a place where humanity becomes enfolded into the land.

### **Extrinsic and Intrinsic**

Kenneth Burke's discussion of "substance," "sub-stance," and contextual definition illustrates the primary process at work in definitional acts of rewilding narratives. As Burke observes, there is often a "pun lurking behind Latin roots," as is the case with "substance" (*Grammar* 21). Burke explains that the word "substance" can "designate what some thing or agent intrinsically *is*," or it can refer to a "sub-stance," "something that stands beneath or supports the person or thing" [emphasis in the original] (21-22). For Burke, determining the substance of a thing simultaneously designates what it is and what it is not, what is "*within* the thing, *intrinsic* to it" and what is "*outside* the thing, *extrinsic* to it" [emphasis in the original] (23). Rather than interpret this structure as a process of bifurcation, Burke contends that the extrinsic and the intrinsic are interrelated in what he labels a definition by context, or the telling "what a thing is [by placing] it in terms of something else," and he further argues that this association creates an "*inevitable* paradox," an "antinomy" and an "unresolvable ambiguity" [emphasis in the original] (24). To Burke, defining is not necessarily a method of culling and dividing,

but a movement of juxtaposition that gathers in and out, this and that into a shared space of interdependence.<sup>15</sup>

Narratives of rewilding echo this Burkean relation and tension between intrinsic and extrinsic definitional elements by bringing what is ordinarily considered extrinsic to wilderness – human culture – into contact with that which is taken as intrinsic to wilderness – nature. This divide between culture and nature appears throughout American arts and letters, but the Wilderness Act of 1964 represents the most significant and established contemporary definition of wilderness that reflects such categorization and dichotomization. Section 2c of the Act, which lays out a succinct definition of wilderness, defines humanity and its corresponding expressions of work and culture in opposition to wilderness areas. “A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape”: so reads the opening sentence of this section. This contrast between culture and nature frames the rest of the section that describes wilderness as a place “untrammeled by man”; it is “undeveloped” and “without permanent improvement or human habitation,” a site where the “imprint of man’s work [is] substantially unnoticeable,” and a place that has been “affected primarily by the forces of nature,” “retaining its primeval character and influence.” While the Act allows for the “public purposes of recreational, scenic, scientific, educational, conservation, and historical use” under section 4b, the language of the Act implies that such conditions are only temporary, for this is a place where “man himself is a visitor who does not remain,” and when these activities do transpire, they are secondary to the preservation of “wilderness character.” While the Act gestures toward human-nature intersections within

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<sup>15</sup> As Randall Roorda explains, “Context and essence are moments, not rivals” (83). Such antinomies of definition are “inevitable,” he writes, and “what counts is how they’re enacted,” rather than some “settlement” between them (83, 80).

wilderness, its emphasis on contrast between these elements structures human culture and nature as separate and distinct elements that may occasionally intermingle before diverging again into discrete realms: humanity returns to sites of culture, purportedly erasing all traces of itself, while wilderness remains primarily affected by the “forces of nature.”

What the Wilderness Act partitions, narratives of rewilding merge into an interdependent position. To state this relation in a more nuanced manner in order not to replicate a binary structure, narratives of rewilding challenge the dichotomized structure of the Wilderness Act but work within its established definition to reconfigure the location or placement of significant sites of value. Rather than introducing new loci of value, narratives of rewilding draw on the implied sites of value already present within the Wilderness Act – culture and nature – and then work to reposition these elements into a relationship of simultaneity and correlation.

The narratives of rewilding by environmental historians William Cronon and James Feldman implicitly demonstrate these resituating moves by telling of moss-covered quarry sites and apple orchards in the midst of forests. This definitional restructuring is explicitly represented in their arguments that wilderness areas can and should bear the traces of previous human habitation and work. Wilderness places should not be sites of erasure, contends Cronon, where the land is scrubbed of any human or cultural presence, for a rewilding wilderness is a place where “natural and human histories are intimately intermingled” (“Riddle” 38). Feldman similarly writes that rewilding wilderness areas are “continually informed by both natural and cultural processes. To understand – and to protect – this wilderness, we need to recognize the role

of both elements” (9). The stories of vegetated quarries and forested orchards are narratives of retention and interrelation, of geographical sites and physical objects that work toward the ends of bringing into relief what has been erased and of demonstrating an intermingling of culture and nature. By highlighting and insisting on the inclusion of cultural objects and history within wilderness areas, Cronon and Feldman keep the frames of reference and value as set forth in the Wilderness Act but establish lines of connection between elements dichotomized by the Act. Rather than define wilderness within a nature-culture binary, Cronon’s and Feldman’s narratives of rewilding structure definitions so that nature and culture come into contact with one other. As Feldman writes, rewilding landscapes “tell stories about the ongoing interactions of nature and culture” (21).

The redefinition of wilderness that Cronon and Feldman work toward through a mode of environmental history is dramatized through a mode of imaginative writing in Cormac McCarthy’s *All the Pretty Horses*. Yet while Cronon and Feldman signify their attention toward wilderness by writing of a legally recognized wilderness – the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness Area – and by overtly situating their work within the categories of natural and ecological history, the narrative of *All the Pretty Horses* participates in a type of writing – the novel – that generally stresses character and plot more than setting.<sup>16</sup> While Cronon’s and Feldman’s focus on wilderness is self-evident by way of subject matter and writing style, McCarthy’s emphasis on wilderness cannot be assumed but, rather, must be established before moving into a discussion on the novel’s interest in and redefinition of wilderness. In comparison to Cronon and Feldman, the narrative of *All the*

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<sup>16</sup> As Eudora Welty argues, “place is one of the lesser angels that watch over the racing hand of fiction,” for other narratological elements, such as character and plot, “rightly relegate place into the shade” (537).

*Pretty Horses* accentuates wilderness through less straightforward means of implication and association as seen in the narrator's attention to natural elements, in the interactions between characters and nature, and in the repetition of a select range of descriptors used for landscape.

#### *A Wilderness of Attention and Diction*

Nature and wilderness gain significance throughout the novel partially by way of the narrator's sustained and careful consideration of particular vegetation and precise geological features that are present in southern Texas and northern Mexico. To cite once example, early in the narrative, John Grady and his father go riding, and the warm weather has brought the "yellow mexicanhat" into bloom (22). They begin riding "along Grape Creek," that is "clear and green with trailing moss braided over the gravel bars," before riding toward higher elevations and into the "open country among scrub mesquite and nopal," after which they enter a land "dotted with cedar" and covered with "traprock" (22-23).

These specific details of land and plants work toward at least two ends. One, the extended attention of the narrator and the precise language of these passages highlight and grant prominence to a presence of nature. The land, rocks, and vegetation in this locale are not a generalized backdrop or some indiscriminate aspect; the language foregrounds these natural aspects, positioning them on a level of importance similar to that of other characters in the novel.<sup>17</sup> Two, the exactness of language indicates a

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<sup>17</sup> Equivalence between nature and other characters is well-trodden critical territory. "The landscape [is] almost a "character" in itself," writes Alan Cheuse (140), and Gail Moore Morrison similarly argues that "landscape remains, in *All the Pretty Horses*, a central character and a characterizing agent" (176). Robert Jarrett (134) and John Cant (11) make comparable observations but apply their analyses to all of

particular type of landscape. Even though the Mexican Hat flower occurs throughout the United States, the use of its unique name suggests a geographical region, and the specific other vegetation in the passage – “scrub mesquite,” “nopal,” and “cedar” – clearly implies a desert locale. Each of these flora suggests arid conditions and a scarcity of plant life (“dotted with cedar”), and when coupled with the rock formations of the passage, these details also indicate wilderness, a barren and rugged landscape.

Similar to the narrator, characters repeatedly attend to nature and wilderness through sight, speech, thought, and bodily movement. Taken together, the amassing repetition of characters’ attention to and interaction with nature represents a second way that the novel emphasizes a presence of wilderness. Throughout the novel the land is continually “looked out over” (59, 62, 70), and “looked out to” (45); it is “admired” (93), “studied” (43, 57, 279), “took in” (49), discussed in multiple contexts (25, 34, 55, 93, 226), “watched” (88, 283), “gestured at” (88), thought and dreamed about (118, 161), and “passed into” (302). If this catalog of actions were merely ocular in nature, we might conclude that the characters are only *aware* of nature, that it is an object of observation and little more. Yet with the inclusion of admiration, study, internal reflection, discussions, thoughts, and dreams, the novel presents nature as an element with which the characters substantially interact.<sup>18</sup> That the characters’ emotions, intellects, and hopes register, bear witness, and respond to a presence of nature indicates that it is not a prop on

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McCarthy’s work. As noted below, I reference this comparison not to relegate environment to a means whereby to understand character but to indicate its respective prominence throughout the novel.

<sup>18</sup> The above analysis is not intended as a study of narrator or characters per se, but more as a discussion of how each acts or fulfills a particular purpose in granting significance to the presence of nature in the novel. This argument, therefore, rearranges a relation of ends to means found in McCarthy scholars such as Alan Cheuse and Stacey Peebles, who echo T.S. Eliot’s idea of an objective correlative and argue that landscape mirrors characters and functions to illustrate interior, emotional conditions.

the periphery or a decorative edging for the plot set up in the initial stages of the narrative but thereafter ignored.<sup>19</sup>

This work of the narrator and characters to direct attention toward wilderness also derives from the novel's use of particular descriptors for land. The novel performs the work of what Kenneth Burke calls "terministic screens," or the function of directing "attention into some channels rather than others" (*Language* 45). As implied above, despite the absence of the word "wilderness" in the text, one channel toward which the novel's language directs attention is wilderness.

The claim that particular terminology equates with wilderness is fraught with inherent complications and dead ends, as the term remains subjective and open to debate. Yet to conclude that "wilderness" lacks any associative terms or productive connotations is inaccurate and neglectful of patterns of language use and of development of ideas, and throughout *All the Pretty Horses*, images and connotations of bareness are the primary channels which emphasize wilderness. Early in their trip, after leaving Reforma, the boys approach more mountainous terrain and cross at a "barren windgap" (59). In a similar scene toward the end of the narrative, as John Grady rides north to return home, he rides along a "barren gravel ridge" above "open country" (269), and novel ends with John Grady riding through a desert where there are "few cattle in that country because it was barren country" (302).

Each of these uses of "barrenness" occurs in a distinct textual passage and works to describe particular geographies encountered by the novel's characters, but the

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<sup>19</sup> In his essay, "Speaking a Word for Nature," Scott Russell Sanders extends this point to contemporary literature in general, arguing that a "deep awareness of nature has been largely excluded from 'mainstream' fiction," that much literature today is unable to consider much beyond "human enclosures" (192, 195). The argument in this chapter presents McCarthy as one exception to Sanders's observation, and the extended discussion in this section demonstrates *how* McCarthy's novel gestures beyond human contexts.

contextual connotations of openness and scarcity help strengthen associative links with wilderness. As John Grady rides across the “barren gravel ridge” during his return trip to Texas, an image of open land signifies wilderness by presenting an unbounded place vast in size, a connotation clarified when John Grady travels through civic boundaries to sleep in a “field far from any town,” in the “open country,” where he watches the “stars trace the arc of the hemisphere” (256). The confined lodging conditions within the small town provide a context for John Grady’s open site where the field appears vast like the night sky and distant stars. While “open” indicates wilderness, by way of size, when John Grady rides through the country where there are only a few cattle, wilderness is indicated by the rugged and harsh territory that is unable to support and sustain much life. The small number of cattle, while an image of limited life in itself, also suggests a paucity of vegetative and human life. This site cannot bear large cattle herds because it lacks the ability to support abundant feed for them and house the multiple human workers necessary for their management. Yet while these connotations of bareness signify absence, their consistent refrain simultaneously marks a presence, or to borrow from Wallace Stevens, the continual absence amasses into “the nothing that is” (15).

### *A Wilderness of Interrelation*

In part, what “is” is wilderness, but an indication of presence also gestures toward what remains in these spaces. As with the rewilding narratives of Cronon and Feldman, a presence is indicated by the traces and marks of humanity, and similar to Cronon and Feldman, *All the Pretty Horses* works toward redefining wilderness by attending to interconnections between these traces and wilderness sites. As Cronon’s and Feldman’s

rewilding narratives strive to include abandoned logging equipment, the remnants of buildings, and evidence of former quarrying work in their presentation and definition of wilderness, so does McCarthy's novel similarly present wilderness locations as bearing the vestiges of human work and habitation in the form of bones of farm animals and in the ruins of former ranches.

Throughout the novel, animal bones image wilderness as a site of confluence. Early in the narrative, John Grady rides south with "the sun coppering his face the red wind blowing out the west" (5). Dismounting atop a small hill, he picks up an old horse skull that has become "frail and brittle. Bleached paper white," and as he turns the skull in his hands, he looks at the "comicbook teeth loose in their sockets" and hears the "muted run of sand in the brainbox" (6). Like a contemporary version of Hamlet holding the skull of Yorick, John Grady turns the horse's skull over in his hands and contemplates the image before him. As Hamlet muses on the connections between the skull, himself, and the jester, and how they are all interconnected in death, so too does the horse skull signify a sense of interrelation. Nature is emphasized here in depictions of sun, sand, and wind, while the horse skull represents human culture, for the horse is likely linked with the ranches in the area. As the sand resides within the skull and the skull rests in the sand, so too do nature and culture intertwine.

Similar scenes occur later in the novel as well when John Grady discovers decaying cattle remains in a gully and a dead colt, but while animal bones indicate a presence of human culture by loose association, a more direct relation is visible in ruins of old ranches and abandoned equipment. Early in the novel, John Grady and his father ride across a "stony mesa" and pass through the "ruins of an old ranch" where "crippled

fenceposts” that carry “remnants of wire not seen in that country for years” are propped among the rocks in the midst of an “ancient pickethouse” and the “wreckage of an old wooden windmill” (23). They ride past these objects and rouse “ducks up out of potholes,” and by evening they descend “through low rolling hills and across the red clay floodplain” (23). The ranch ruins, the ducks, and the geographical landforms mark and define this land through which John Grady and his father ride as a location of nature and culture at the same time, and the absence of dialog throughout the scene further supports an idea of simultaneous association. The riders encounter each object in turn with no comment and without assigning value to one over the others or attempting to excuse the presence of any one object. They ride past ducks and hills just as they do fence posts and windmill.

Each of these scenes and objects – the horse skull, ranch ruins, and ducks – not only registers an interrelation between nature and culture but also indicates that this interplay is not static but a process of decay and rewilding. The sun bleaching the horse skull slowly turns it white, and the UV rays weaken the skull, a process abetted by the sand and its etchings inside the “brainbox.” Such interactions remove the skull from its associations with ranching practices and toward dust and the natural elements of which it is composed. The “crippled” fence posts and wrecked windmill indicate movement toward a rewilded state as they break down into the rocks.

This work of the narrative to define wilderness as a site where nature and culture interact is also implied in formal elements of the novel, in the presence of characters and in the narratological position of the characters in relation to the narrator. Similar to the animal bones in dirt and the farm ruins propped up in rocks, the presence of the novel’s

characters also contributes to the narrative's imaging of wilderness as a site of interrelation, for they too represent an element of culture within the novel's wildernesses. The "barren windgap" that the boys initially cross before entering the mountains simultaneously echoes with their conversation and the sound of their horses' hooves. The "open country" is also the site through which John Grady and Rawlins are currently riding, and at one point the boys encounter the residue of at least one campsite where ranch workers regularly stay when corralling wild horses (148). As with the other aspects of human culture in the novel, the characters reflect correlation and process. The characters' own attrition warrants a full discussion, which will be considered in a later section, but for now, in this context, the riders and their horses in the novel's barren landscape represent the narrative's work to correlate nature and culture in sites of wilderness.

Regarding the narratological positioning of the narrator and characters, their relation to the events of the novel differs, as the narrator remains outside or above the world of the novel while the characters are part of or inside that world. Yet the narrator and characters work in coordination; they function similarly in their consideration of wilderness. This difference of position but correlation of work between narrator and characters suggests that the novel's formal characteristics function similarly to the narrative's content in efforts to connect extrinsic and intrinsic. As narratives of rewilding bring culture (an extrinsic element to standard wilderness definitions) together with nature (an intrinsic element), so the novel intertwines the narrator, who can be viewed as an extrinsic or extradiegetic narratological element, with the characters, who can be

interpreted as intrinsic or intradiegetic figures,<sup>20</sup> as both work toward imaging wilderness as a site of nature and as a place of culture.

### **Additional Sites of Value**

In assembling the extrinsic together with the intrinsic, in reconfiguring relations between sites of value (culture and nature) within definitions of wilderness, narratives of rewilding assign significance across a broader range of characteristics by designating additional elements of value. Narratives of rewilding not only correlate extrinsic with intrinsic but also declare the now formerly extrinsic element as a feature of importance and meaning. This act of defining wilderness, however, should not be understood as an attempt to establish essence or as an appeal to the “real” or “true” characteristics of wilderness. While essences or real categories exist, they are largely unprofitable in acts of defining, for definitions remain fluid, plastic and malleable, a reflection of cultural usage more than an appearance of some ideal form.<sup>21</sup> Rather than participate in what Edward Schiappa labels a “valorization of essence,” the action of definition carried out by narratives of rewilding should be interpreted as a movement to establish additional objects or sites of value (168-169). As Schiappa argues, the question of “What is X,” should be replaced with “What are the appropriate values that we want to make “essential” to particular definitions?” (168-169).

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<sup>20</sup> There is one possible exception in this relationship between the narrator and characters as extradiegetic and intradiegetic elements. Late in the novel, Alejandra’s great aunt and godmother, Alfonsa, narrates an extensive story of her upbringing and her family’s role in Mexico’s various revolutions. As she tells this story to Grady, she is outside the timeframe and world which she describes, which situates her as an extradiegetic narrator to her story. That said, however, she simultaneously remains as an intradiegetic figure, for she is narrated by the narrator throughout this scene.

<sup>21</sup> This is not to say that aspects beyond cultural usage and construction are not present in definitional acts. Determining what those elements may be, however, remains difficult if not impossible, making them problematic in efforts of definition.

An appeal to value here does not necessitate a link with economic connotations.<sup>22</sup> Value in this context does not reference a process whereby objects or places gain or lose worth based on market demands and consumer desire. Rather, “value” in this discussion references instrumentality, how something enhances or adds meaning. To say that narratives of rewilding designate additional elements as sites of value is to argue that they attend to multiple features and objects – natural and cultural – in wilderness, viewing each as an element that augments a sense of wilderness.

As implied above, Cronon’s and Feldman’s narratives of rewilding contend that buildings, exotic plant species, and other evidences of human work and habitation supplement wilderness by aiding interpretation and understanding. Feldman argues that such elements clarify vision, helping visitors see and experience a “legible” land before them rather than an “illusion” (231).<sup>23</sup> To Feldman, such legibility partially derives from knowledge of the past, and he contends that retaining traces of previous human presences allows visitors to better “understand the landscapes they encounter” (231). Feldman’s point here, despite its particularized context of the Apostle Islands, implies a larger scope as a comment on rewilding wilderness places in general. Like a cabin or old mining road in the Apostle Islands, human artifacts in a rewilding wilderness can enrich such places.

The argument that objects and remnants of human culture complement and even augment wilderness has obvious limits and implies a slippery slope toward nonsensical

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<sup>22</sup> For a full analysis of economic underpinnings in environmental discourse, see Jack Turner’s *The Abstract Wild*, particularly chapter four of this work.

<sup>23</sup> Cronon makes a similar link between human influence and objects in natural sites and seen aspects of the wild in a recent interview in *Orion Magazine*. In discussing Point Reyes, California, Cronon argues that the “juxtaposition of the pastoral with the wild” is what makes this site so “ravishingly beautiful,” for “it’s the pastoral that makes the wild visible” (“Out” 67).

positions that any type of human presence (or abuse) leads back to wilderness in some manner. Yet within their context, Cronon's and Feldman's comments imply two conditions: that human artifacts are fading and that some sense of the wild is returning. Decaying cabins and disappearing roads point up wilderness by taking on wilderness qualities of wildness and of uninhabited space. Their decay points toward wilderness by indicating a movement back toward a state of wild nature and by emphasizing the resilience of wilderness to remain and return in spots modified by humanity. In sites of rewilding wildernesses, aspects of humanity are present, but they act as grounds from which to clearly see and experience wilderness.

As with the Apostle Islands, former ranchers, miners, and other occupants have scattered various reminders of their former presence throughout the wilderness of *All the Pretty Horses*. If translated through Wilderness Act logic, the novel's wilderness would be deemed trammled, with the imprints of humanity exceeding the threshold of "unnoticeable." Yet when approached from a standpoint of rewilding, these traces of humanity and culture shift from an undesired and invasive extra to a site of value that aids understanding and clarifies perception of wilderness areas.<sup>24</sup>

During John Grady's final ride north to return home, for instance, he encounters the abovementioned tailings and abandoned mining equipment. He rides past these elements after crossing the "barren gravel hills" and before moving into a plain described as a "tenantless waste" (285). In a context of rewilding the tailings and other remnants of mining activities interrelates with the land around them. Like the gravel hills, the mine too is barren, and similar to the "tenantless waste," the remaining equipment implies

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<sup>24</sup> This is not to say that human traces somehow add value to the land itself. The emphasis here is on *narratives, understandings, and perceptions* of wilderness, all which benefit from recognizing rather than ignoring human traces and influences in wilderness areas.

ideas of an unoccupied site. Positioned as such by a narrative of rewilding, these human objects and traces in the land become additional sites that exude meaning and help communicate ideas of wilderness to John Grady; they become part of experience in this place, underscoring and accenting the sense of a desolate wilderness.

In a similar scene earlier in the novel, when John Grady and his father ride through the ruined ranch with “crippled fenceposts” and a wrecked windmill, they have recently passed through “broken hills” and “cobbled” ground (23). Although “cobbled” can designate the action of bringing together and repairing, as in “cobbling together” or in reference to a repairer of shoes, it also speaks of a fracturing. A cobbled road is one paved with parts of brick or stone. The context of the sentence leans toward this second connotation of “fracturing” by placing “cobbled” in relation with “broken,” with both adjectives similarly signifying a ruined or derelict aspect of the land. As the abandoned mine and discarded equipment supplemented John Grady’s understanding of a desolate wilderness, so too do the “crippled fenceposts” and wrecked windmill aid in understanding a broken and fractured land, each reinforcing meaning found in the other.

Positioned as such, elements of culture and aspects of wilderness become consubstantial, which as Kenneth Burke explains, represents an act, an “*acting-together*” [emphasis in the original] (*Rhetoric* 21). While person A and person B are not identical, Burke writes, “insofar as their interests are joined, A is *identified* with B,” and “in being identified with B, A is “substantially one” with a person other than himself” [emphasis in the original] (20-21). Narratives of rewilding consubstantiate culture and nature, positioning culture within nature and disclosing nature within culture. While the above scenes indicate the consubstantiality subtly at work in *All the Pretty Horses*, the most

poignant reference to such interrelatedness occurs when John Grady rides through an abandoned apple orchard and into cabin.

Upon his release from prison, John Grady returns to the hacienda in Coahuila, and after borrowing a horse he rides up through the high country. As he descends in the evening, he rides through a group of trees and into an abandoned orchard. The “grove of apple trees” has “gone wild and brambly,” and when he sees the “ruins of an old cabin,” he walks his horse inside (225-226). Roof beams lie partially dismantled in the room, former fires have claimed window frames and sashes, and tacks hold an old calf hide to a wall. There is a “strange air to the place,” and John Grady’s horse “liked nothing about it” (226). The scene ends as John Grady turns carefully in the room, leaves, and rides out past a marshland where “doves called in the winey light” (226).

The transition into and away from the abandoned orchard and cabin might suggest that John Grady experiences two distinct locations in this passage: a site of wild nature and a site of culture. In part, such an interpretation is accurate. The text differentiates between the trees outside the orchard and those inside, and the cabin represents a unique feature in this land of marshes and doves. Yet it is just as accurate to argue that the orchard and cabin do not separate John Grady from a sense of the wild but that these features of culture and indications of previous human habitation extend and emphasize a sense of a wild nature that he has experienced throughout his ride. The apple trees that have gone “wild and brambly” doubly signify; they represent culture in the human who planted and cultivated them while also referencing a wild condition beyond the care and maintenance of humans as they have become gnarled and entangled.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, the

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<sup>25</sup> A link between apples and the wild is particularly acute, an association developed by Henry David Thoreau in his essay “Wild Apples,” in which he contends that most fruits require human care, but the

cabin indicates the presence of human culture in the walls that remain as well as a sense of the wild by what is now missing. What had previously separated the cabin from the air and land around it is now gone. The holes where roof joists, windows, and doors once were now admit and intertwine with sun, rain, and other natural elements. While the horse and John Grady might physically be aware of cultural aspects of the apple trees and the cabin, they are psychologically attuned to the elements of the wild in the “strange air” throughout the place. The trees beyond the orchard and the marshland imply a sense of wild nature, but just as Cronon’s romantic ruins enhance a wilderness experience in the Apostle Islands, so too do the strange cabin and brambly apple trees sharpen and accentuate John Grady’s experience of a wild place.

### **From Hierarchical to Rhizomatic**

In collapsing the distance between intrinsic and extrinsic, and in assigning additional sites of value, narratives of rewilding shift away from a hierarchical formulation and move toward the construction of horizontal relations. Invoking the language of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, rewilding represents a move from arborescent (tree-like) systems to rhizomatic interactions. “Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems,” they write, in which the different parts play the role of an “*opposed segment*” to the other elements with “binary relations between the points” [emphasis in the original] (16, 21). A rhizomatic relationship is “acentered, nonhierarchical . . . without a General”; it

“connects any point to any other point” within an “alliance,” which can be indicated

through a set of repeated conjunctions “and . . . and . . . and” (21, 25). By granting  
apple “emulates man’s independence and enterprise” (270). Thoreau observes that the apple tree makes “its own way amid the aboriginal trees,” and that it runs “wild” and maintains itself (270).

preference to rhizomatic systems, Deleuze and Guattari, of course, replicate the hierarchical systems they critique and seek to replace, but their evocation of a rhizome provides a beneficial image in describing the form of redefinition that is at work in narratives of rewilding. Like a ginger root, narratives of rewilding situate definitional sites of value as parallel nodes or hubs that send out and share shoots of meaning.

In Cronon's and Feldman's narratives of rewilding, a select range of verbs and adverbs indicates the presence of rhizomatic relations. To Cronon, the Apostle Islands are a "superb example of a wilderness in which natural and human histories are *intimately intermingled*," where "natural and cultural resources are *equally* important [emphasis mine] ("Riddle" 38). Searching for ways to preserve such an environment, Cronon proposes to "*combine* designated wilderness with an equal and ongoing commitment to interpreting the shared past of humanity and nature," for such a model can "*integrate* the natural and cultural resources" of the islands [emphasis mine] ("Riddle" 41). Writing with similar language, Feldman contends that history and nature work "*simultaneously*" on the islands, and after citing various forest clearings, he claims that they "provide examples of how nature and history, working *together*, created a treasured wild place" [emphasis mine] (224). Sites of rewilding are places of process, locations where signs of human work and history coexist with expressions of nature, and while one may temporally be accentuated, definitions and understandings of such places require recognizing and attending to both. The language throughout these arguments indicates the simultaneity of both nature and culture in places of rewilding, for this is not the syntax of arborescent opposition but of rhizomatic alliance. As they look to intermingle and

integrate nature and culture, Cronon and Feldman aim to hold both elements in equal status and trace the meaning that emanates from their shared space.

What Cronon and Feldman argue through verbs and adverbs, *All the Pretty Horses* represents through symbolic scenes. A dramatization of a rhizomatic alliance between nature and culture runs throughout the narrative, but it is first glimpsed in the novel's opening paragraph. John Grady has arrived to view his grandfather's body in the family farmhouse:

The candleflame and the image of the candleflame caught in the pierglass twisted and righted when he entered the hall and again when he shut the door. He took off his hat and came slowly forward. The floorboards creaked under his boots. In his black suit he stood in the dark glass where the lilies leaned so palely from their waisted cutglass vase. Along the cold hallway behind him hung the portraits of forebears only dimly known to him all framed in glass and dimly lit above the narrow wainscotting. He looked down at the guttered candlestub. He pressed his thumbprint in the warm wax pooled on the oak veneer. Lastly he looked at the face so caved and drawn among the folds of funeral cloth, the yellowed moustache, the eyelids paper thin. That was not sleeping. That was not sleeping. (3)

Although the paragraph does not directly address a correlation between nature and culture, the relation between images and things acts as an analogue and as an analogy, introducing the theme of interrelatedness and setting up the novel's tenor on the topic.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> To be fair, the novel at times also splits image and thing, presenting images as false constructs and deceptive. In one significant scene, Grady asks his grandfather about a painting of horses that matched no other horse for "no such horse ever was" (16). His grandfather looks at the image, "as if he'd never seen it before and he said those are picturebook horses and went on eating" (16). Similar to Baudrillard's

In a context of western intellectual history, the discussion of a relation between images and things or substances perpetually rises up in multiple contexts and documents, but in general, the two elements are frequently set in opposition and a preference is granted to one over the other. In his Theory of Forms, Plato privileges ideas or concepts over things or tangible objects. Jean Baudrillard similarly argues that substance and reality no longer exist, for the “era of simulation is inaugurated by a liquidation of all referentials,” and “it is no longer a question of imitation, nor duplication, nor even parody. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real” (2). While Plato and Baudrillard distinguish image from thing, situating them in a relation of difference and preference, they are joined together and placed within a nonhierarchical frame in McCarthy’s opening paragraph.

As John Grady opens and closes the door, the candle’s flame and its image replicate one another. When the incoming wind diverts the flame, the image of the flame also shifts. As the door shuts and the flame returns to an upright position, so does the flame’s image. Although an argument could be made that the flame is separated from its image because it is mirrored and reversed, the text does not privilege one over the other and presents them as twinned rather than inverted. A similar effect occurs two lines later when the text describes John Grady and his black suit as standing “*in the dark glass*” [emphasis mine]. Rather than creating a structure of opposition by standing in front of,

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conception of simulacra, the novel presents image devoid of substance in this scene, but it is just as accurate to argue that the novel is raising a position in order to refute or challenge it. In addition to challenging a hierarchical structuring of image and thing, by situating them within a relation of simultaneity (as I present here), the novel also contests Baudrillard’s ideas by implying that the real is accessible. Grady’s father looks at the country as if he saw it “right at last” (23), and later in the novel Grady encounters a “real horse, real rider, real land and sky” (132).

away from, and distinct from the mirror, John Grady is his image and the image is John Grady, each is present in the other and is the other.

An equating of image and thing occurs in a similar manner later in the novel as well, when John Grady and Rawlins make camp and build a “great bonfire against the cold” (93). They settle into their blankets, and “out on the plain in the shoreless night they could see like a reflection of their own fire in a dark lake the fire of the vaqueros five miles away” (93). As if they have built their fire on a lakeshore and the light casts forth onto the waters to create a mirrored image, the boys are able to see a second fire across the prairie, but the apparent image of the second fire and the actual presence of that fire assimilate into a single entity. Like John Grady’s presence in his mirrored image, this correspondence between reflection and actuality further supports a horizontal relationship rather than a hierarchical one.

The framed images of John Grady’s forebears in the second half of the opening paragraph, however, appear to dispute this argument for the novel’s fusion of image and thing into sole property. The portraits of John Grady’s relatives are not the actual people, and their images seem to be privileged, for they alone constitute their presence in this scene and are the primary manner in which John Grady relates to them. The portraits are not people,<sup>27</sup> but the repetition of “dimly” brings the images and the people into a rhizomatic relation of alliance. The tangible and physical forebears are only “dimly known” to John Grady, and their images are “dimly lit” in the hallway. They are similarly known and seen, and in respect to John Grady, the images and the people are positioned not in opposition but in correlation.

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<sup>27</sup> My phrasing here partially derives from Michel Foucault’s *This is Not a Pipe*, in which he analyzes relationships between images and things.

### *Optical Democracy*

This discursive but supporting discussion of the novel's horizontal structure between image and thing supplements an analysis of its rhizomatic relation between nature and culture, an alliance that creates a flat ontology, a concept coined by Manuel Delanda to describe a system of "interacting parts and emergent wholes" made up of "singular individuals" that are not arranged within hierarchical categories (51).

Throughout McCarthy's narrative, as images are equated with substances, so are humans with water, ground, and horses, and each expression of life represents an "individual" that is equalized with others as it is placed within a single grouping of "thing," a categorical marker from which even humans are not exempt. During a thunderstorm, for example, Blevins strips his clothes off and huddles on the ground in fear, and the text identifies him as a "thing . . . in that landscape" (70). Like any other rock or tree, Blevins remains in place, sitting still in the storm.

This equating of all things occurs even more overtly later in the novel when John Grady shoots a doe. He approaches the animal and "sat watching her for a long time" (282). Sitting next to the dying deer, John Grady thinks about Blevins and a police captain he encountered while in Mexico, and when he thinks about his lover Alejandra, he also recalls the "birds and the cattle standing in the grass and the horses on the mesa" (282). He turns his attention back to the doe as the sky darkens and a wind courses across the land, and "in the dying light a cold blue cast had turned the doe's eyes to but one thing more of things she lay among in that darkening landscape. Grass and blood. Blood and stone" (282). The scene ends with John Grady thinking about Alejandra, sadness, and beauty.

John Grady's actions and thoughts vacillate among and meander through a series of disparate flora and fauna and humans, and their juxtaposition in this scene suggests more than a circumstantial relationship. The initial context of the hunt and the double action of John Grady's sight of the doe while thinking about Blevins and the captain implies that death unifies these different things. Like the doe, Blevins is shot late in the novel and John Grady wonders here if the captain remains alive. A link of all things to death helps explain the latter part of this scene as well, for the 'dying light' casts a "cold blue" over the doe, grass, and stone alike, shading each object similarly and assembling them into a nonhierarchical category.<sup>28</sup> In the central portion of the passage John Grady remembers Alejandra (who is not dead) and the live animals on the mesa. While this theme of death does not directly aid in explicating this material, it suggests related themes of physical absence and loss. Like the birds and cattle in the grass, and similar to the horses on the mesa, Alejandra is now lost to John Grady as well, and just as the fading light flattens hierarchies between the doe's eyes, grass, and rocks, so the memories of John Grady situate Alejandra within a coordinating relationship with the land, animals, and vegetation.<sup>29</sup>

What content and theme portray, the novel's form also implies. As intimated in the foregoing passages and analysis, to discuss the novel's flat ontology is to attend to McCarthy's writing style, a narrative technique often labeled as "optical democracy."

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<sup>28</sup> John Grady's witness of the fading light in the dying deer's eye bears echoes of Aldo Leopold's much recounted experience with a dying wolf in his work *A Sand County Almanac*. After shooting the wolf, Leopold reaches the dying animal in time to "watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes" (138). This intertextual reference further supports my reading of interconnection, for as Leopold watches the wolf die, he realizes he was not "thinking like a mountain," and not recognizing an affinity between wolves, deer, and vegetation, that fewer wolves mean more deer, and that more deer equate with over-grazed vegetation.

<sup>29</sup> The scene which introduces Alejandra into the narrative is similarly constructed within a flat ontology in which a series of "ands" connect cattle, a river, antelope, deer, a road, and tracks of animals with "a young girl" riding down the road (93-94).

The phrase derives from the author's 1985 novel, *Blood Meridian*, after riders encounter an Apache corpse hanging from a tree, a "thing of leather and bone scoured by the pumice winds" (247). The horses trudge on through the "neuter austerity of that terrain" in which "all phenomena were bequeathed a strange equality and no one thing nor spider nor stone nor blade of grass could put forth claim to precedence" (247). Such equality proceeds from "clarity of these articles [that] belied their familiarity" and from an act of vision that "predicates the whole on some feature or part" in a land where no one thing is more "luminous" or "enshadowed" than another, which results in an "optical democracy" where "preference is made whimsical and a man and a rock become endowed with unguessed kinships" (247).

This passage on optical democracy, according to Phillip and Delys Snyder, has "functioned as a kind of critical gloss for [McCarthy's] descriptive writing in general" (33), as a type of meta-commentary from the author on his own style that has been adapted and extended by various critics for their own readings of McCarthy's form of writing. "For McCarthy," writes David Holloway, "optical democracy first of all means looking at landscape, and then writing about landscape, in such a way that any anthropocentric assumption of human primacy over the natural world is rejected" (192). In a similar manner, Megan McGilchrist writes, "McCarthy's optical democracy posits an equality of mere objects in the natural world, no thing (or being) being of greater value than another" (111).

The grammatical structure of McCarthy's passage reinforces these conclusions, for as Phillip and Delys Snyder observe, McCarthy's writing "tends to privilege coordination rather than subordination" through his ubiquitous use of coordinating

conjunctions in the creation of lists that equate all items in the list in a “linguistic democracy” (33). The repeated use of “nor” by McCarthy, as the Snyders highlight, creates a sense of “holistic apprehension,” and the use of “and” produces a “democratic compound subject” between man and rock (33). These observations return the analysis of this chapter to a discussion of the rhizomatic and the flattened ontological structure and its use of conjunctions to create alliances rather than oppositions, a form that establishes a sense of commonality among elements or things.

The novel’s subject-verb structure complements this use of conjunctions in supporting a move away from anthropocentrism.<sup>30</sup> As Nancy Kreml observes, sentences often lack direct objects, “actions happen . . . without an actor, who acts upon something else” (39-40). When actors do appear, they do not act as “agents” and are often relegated to nonspecific pronouns such as “they” (40).<sup>31</sup> I would go further and add that McCarthy often strips his sentences of action altogether, allowing objects to remain by themselves. To cite one example, the following scene takes place as the boys reach the more mountainous country before arriving at the hacienda. “They rode down through the cooling blue shadowland of the north slope. Evergreen ash growing in the rocky draws. Persimmon, mountain gum” (59). This passage progressively becomes void of action and actants, or what Kreml identifies as agents. The actants of the first sentence are

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<sup>30</sup> John Cant takes up an opposing view claiming that in comparison with earlier writings, *All the Pretty Horses* “adopts a literary style that reflects a change in the mood and atmosphere of his work. His extensive use of dialogue creates . . . a closer concern with the humanity of his characters” (193). While Cant is partially arguing that characters appear more human, more “fleshed out,” he also claims that “character and emotion become of primary importance” in the narrative (193). While Cant’s claim may be one that highlights a “balance” between land and human in the novel (as he footnotes), the form of the novel’s dialogue undermines his point. As the Snyders imply, even if McCarthy includes more dialogue, it is rarely accompanied by quotation marks, which supports a non-hierarchical structure by shifting focus away from human actions and presence (34).

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Lincoln offers a similar observation, arguing that the “narrative runs objectively neutral with few personal names,” but the point is not developed, nor is it a focus of his work.

completely missing by the final phrase, as is a predicate clause; the form thereby replicates the focus on objects: the plants. By eliminating the positions in the sentence where humanity would normally appear, objects self-predicate.

### **Explicating Import**

The above analysis of the redefining work present in rewilding narratives implies a loose order, that one act leads to another or that one definitional process causes or prompts further and distinct acts of definition. Establishing an exact order is less important, however, than demonstrating the range or reach of redefinition carried out by texts of rewilding that not only interrelates extrinsic and intrinsic elements of wilderness but that also assigns value to newly-imported aspects and that insists that hierarchies between formerly separate elements be dissolved.

The effects of such redefining work are traceable in multiple directions. Some narratives of rewilding similar to Cronon's and Feldman's argue toward an anthropocentric end, contending that remnants and artifacts of human work and history accent and augment human existence by supporting a human psychological response to wilderness and aiding a human understanding of such places. Such an effect is present in *All the Pretty Horses*, as demonstrated above, but the novel simultaneously moves beyond anthropocentric values by muting the human presence within wilderness and by imaging a rewilding wilderness as a place where the human is dissolved into sites of nature.

Even as decaying cabins and rewilding apple orchards augment John Grady's perception and sense of wilderness, which suggests that sites of rewilding are a resource

for the expansion and support of human life, the narrative also challenges this position by minimizing the agency of humanity within sites of wilderness. Rather than characters making places of wilderness their own through voice and action, and rather than the boys achieving postures of authority from which they retrieve gain from the land around them, the novel presents human figures within and absorbed by nature.

As John Grady, Rawlins, and Blevins ride throughout various geographies they rarely fulfill roles as agents affecting the land before them or of human figures producing change within their environments. This posture of limited agency reflects an absence of physical work upon the land, such as farming or mining, as well as mental and psychological activities that would “lay claim” to the land around them. When John Grady asks Rawlins, “How does this country suit you?” Rawlins “leaned and spat but he didnt answer” (52), and when John Grady attempts to describe the land to which they are riding, he claims that he “cant picture country like that” (55). Their silence about and curtailed mental imaging of the land remove the boys from a position to evaluate the land or to pass judgment on it.

The position of John Grady and Rawlins in relation to the land throughout southern Texas and northern Mexico is effectively conveyed when they first ride into the town of La Vega after securing employment at the hacienda in Coahuila. They don new duds and have their hair cut for the occasion. Their hats sit “cocked forward on their heads” and they look “from side to side as they jogged along as if to challenge the countryside or anything it might hold” (119). This attempted challenge is in appearance only, however, for even though they race the horses and draw the attention of local inhabitants, they pass in a “muted fury . . . leaving all unchanged where they had been:

dust, sunlight, a singing bird” (120). Much like their verbal silence before the land, their “muted fury” in this scene indicates a limited human presence and effect within nature. Even if their clothes and racing horses imply a measure of influence, it is temporary, fading as quickly as the sounds of their horses’ hooves.

A significant challenge to this claim of minimal human influence on nature comes by way of the boys’ work at the hacienda in Coahuila to break and train horses. Early in their employment on the hacienda, local vaqueros bring in sixteen “wild” colts, and John Grady proposes that they attempt to “break all of em in four days” (98-100). By noon of the first day, all sixteen horses stand “sidehobbled” with the “voice of the breaker still running in their brains like the voice of some god come to inhabit them” (105). By dark, John Grady has ridden eleven of the sixteen horses, and

the wild and frantic band of mustangs that had circled the potrero that morning like marbles swirled in a jar could hardly be said to exist and the animals whinnied to one another in the dark and answered back as if some one among their number were missing, or some thing. (107).

If Robert Jarrett’s claim that in *All the Pretty Horses* the “horse is a particularly complex symbolic representation of the relation between the human and the natural” is admissible, then John Grady’s and Rawlins’ horse-breaking represents a dominance of nature rather than a position of interrelation and limited influence (107). Rather than remaining silent, John Grady’s voice in this passage represents significant influence over the horses, a type of possession, and his work drastically changes the animals, removing something from them.

Yet John Grady's work with the horses also presents his desire to intermingle with and become part of horses/ nature. John Grady initiates his work by pressing a horse's head against his chest where its "hot sweet breath" can rise up over his "face and neck" and where he can feel the horse's blood and speak to it (103). His voice that runs through the minds of the horses can be read as his desire to "inhabit," not just to control and dominate, the animals. Either way, similar to their temporary influence on their ride into La Vega, this work with the horses is brief and impermanent. By the end of their first summer of work, men arrest John Grady and Rawlins for their connection to Blevins and his crimes and transport them to a provisional jail in Encantada before moving them to a prison in Saltillo. The text implies that the other ranch hands do not continue or complete John Grady's work to break the horses while he is in prison, and when he returns to the hacienda in Coahuila, the horses appear wild again (241).

In the space created by a minimized agency of humanity, the text foregrounds nature acting within and upon itself. Early in their ride south, after the boys cross an initial set of mountains, they look south where the "last shadows were running over the land before the wind and the sun to the west lay blood red among the shelving clouds and the distant cordilleras ranged down the terminals of the sky" (59). The subject / predicate relationship throughout this passage implies that shadows, sun, clouds, and mountains are the sources of action in this environment. In every case except the sun, these subjects are linked with specific activities or influences within this wilderness. The shadows *run* over the land, the clouds *shelve*, and the mountains *range* across the sky.

Although these shifting clouds and encompassing mountains relate to Burke's distinction of "things move, persons act" (*Language* 64), the novel's subsequent scene

challenges the confinement of aspects of nature to mere movement. As the boys make camp that night, the text situates nature as the primary agent or actant within wilderness. With the others sleeping, John Grady looks toward the mountains where the “Pleiades seemed to be rising up into the darkness above the world and dragging all the stars away, the great diamond of Orion and Cepella and the signature of Cassiopeia all rising up through the phosphorous dark like a sea-net” (60). While clouds and mountains are moving *within* nature in the previous passage, here the Pleiades acts directly *upon* nature, *dragging* stars toward the horizon as Orion, Cepella, and Cassiopeia arrange what appears to be a net in the sky. While these proceedings – as astronomical actions – might appear as removed from wilderness, events of nature the following morning “ground” the actions of the stars. After John Grady awakes, he walks out from camp to “study the new country as it shaped itself out of the darkness below them” (60), and herein is the phrase that could perform as a tagline for the role of nature throughout the novel: it shapes itself.<sup>32</sup>

This shift in agency lends weight to two analogous movements: a lessening of the human and a melding of humanity with or enfolding into expressions of the environment. As implied above, narratives of rewilding simultaneously point up a human presence and absence within sites of wilderness. Even while roads or farming equipment indicate human influence, such evidence marks an absence of humanity; these are artifacts abandoned by a vacating humanity and are fading, giving way to decay and merging into the rewilding land around them. As an extension of the novel’s flat ontology, this

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<sup>32</sup> Gary Snyder’s definition of “wild” is noted in the next chapter in a different context, but his ideas of wild places as “self-propagating” and “self-maintaining” add meaning in this context as well (10-11).

movement toward interrelation by way of human diminishment defines not only the objects of humanity but also the human itself.

Similar to the wrecked windmills, twisted fence posts, and brittle animal bones, John Grady appears “pale and thin” under a wilderness moon when he first wades across the river into Mexico (45). His time in Mexico and his interaction within the landscape do little to improve his physical stature and apparent fragility. By the time he rides north again and crosses back into Texas, he appears further diminished, twice described as “pale”: a “pale rider” and “pale and shivering,” a figure who is almost ghost-like in appearance (285-287). Pale might act as a racial marker in these passages, situating John Grady in contrast to the indigenous Mexican population, but its link with “shivering” lends more credibility to a reading of physical diminishment.

John Grady’s diminished self situates him within a rhizomatic relation with the land around him, as I have already argued, but it also leads to a state akin to disappearance, where John Grady merges into the land, a condition persistently emphasized in the final pages of the novel. After visiting with a judge about Blevins’s horse, he rides out of town until he “vanished in the dark” (294), departing from Rawlins for the final time, Rawlins watches until John Grady is “gone” (300), and when John Grady rides past a group of Native Americans, they watch him “vanish upon that landscape solely because he was passing. Solely because he would vanish” (301). Like a continuously beating drum throughout the final pages of the novel, John Grady’s dissolution repeatedly resurfaces in the text until a fusing of sorts occurs as he “passed and paled *into* the darkening land” [emphasis mine] (302).

In this ebbing movement, John Grady and Rawlins do not so much act upon the land as absorb it and become part of it. After crossing the Rio Grande, they ride across a gravel plain, where they “took in the look of the new country” (49). The actions of the boys here imply an internalization of and melding with land rather than a possession of it, an arrangement that is formalized shortly thereafter when the boys stop for lunch next to a spring. After eating, John Grady strips off his clothes, wades into the water, and lies “backward into the water” until he disappears (58). Almost as if he performs some version of a self-baptism here, John Grady’s submersion indicates that he aims not necessarily to make wilderness his own but rather to become part of it.

In a similar scene, during their first trip into the mountains above the hacienda, John Grady lies on the ground, watching the stars overhead. He places his “hands on the ground at either side of him and pressed them against the earth,” and in this position he “slowly turned dead center to the world, all of it taut and trembling and moving enormous and alive under his hands” (119). Even though John Grady remains outside the terrestrial elements here and is not corporally absorbed into them, as with the water, the pattern of taking in and becoming part of continues, in that John Grady’s movements come to resemble those of the earth as he “centers” himself within its rhythms and conditions, a relationship that holds through the end of the novel when he passes into the land.

Yet as Richard Poirier implies in his essay “How Would You Like to Disappear,” depictions of diminishment reinstate the very objects they attempt to lessen. In the case of John Grady, his repeated vanishings throughout the latter part of the novel keep him continually present in the text, and from a reader’s position, the physical presence of the book and the printed words on the page retain John Grady even after the novel is closed.

While he moves toward a fusing within the land throughout the narrative, he remains visible and available to a reader as one possible response to sites of rewilding wilderness. As John Grady encounters and becomes part of the land around him, *All the Pretty Horses* narrates a posture in wilderness that does not place the human in a position of opposition to nature or as the focal point, but rather moves that figure toward finding the rhythms of an environment and enfoldng the self into them.

### **Chapter Three**

#### **(Re)Visioning Wilderness and History in Marilynne Robinson's *Housekeeping***

On August 8, 2005, United States Senator Russell Feingold helped dedicate the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness in Wisconsin's Apostle Islands National Lakeshore. The event officially and publically recognized legislation passed by Congress in November 2004, and signed by President George W. Bush on December 8, 2004. Beginning his speech, Feingold declared the ceremony marked the "creation of the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness within the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore." After evoking the memory of Nelson's environmental advocacy for the Apostle Islands and citing the work of others who supported the creation of the wilderness area, Feingold noted the international attraction of the islands, claiming, "we have it all in this Park: ecological and cultural resources intertwined with one another. The history of the islands is a history of people living off, and very much in balance with, the land and water surrounding them (21456)."

The Apostle Islands existed long before Feingold's speech; the islands' hemlock forests, secluded lakeshores, and animal species – elements of wildness and wilderness<sup>33</sup> – subsist without the Senator's words. Yet as implied in his phrase "marking the creation," Feingold's narrative of these islands helps shape and create this wilderness place. As such, the Apostle Islands represent a "dialectical relationship between environment and human narrative" (Sheldrake 1). Feingold's presentation is but one narrative about the islands; it joins countless other Ojibwe narratives, early European accounts, and other more recent discursive acts, but his speech signifies particular ways in which a construction of place ensues from human language.

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<sup>33</sup> According to the National Park Service, 80% of the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore was designated wilderness area by congress and President George W. Bush.

The phrase “construction of place” might appear as little more than a catch phrase or as an example of academic jargon that seems impressive but lacks substance. This impression, in part, derives from the apparent familiarity of “place” as it is part of everyday parlance and general knowledge. But it simultaneously eludes definition. “Place is difficult to theorize because of its confused and intractable qualities,” argues Jonathan Smith, Andrew Light, and David Roberts in their introduction to *Philosophy and Geography III: Philosophies of Place* (6). “It is a word wrapped in common sense,” writes human geographer Tim Cresswell (1). Despite its elusive quality, however, specific conceptual frames afford clarification.

One structure of understanding occurs as place is set in context of and in contrast with space. “The ideas ‘space’ and ‘place’ require each other for definition,” writes Yi-Fu Tuan (6). Like hot and cold requiring each other for understanding and definition, place and space add meaning and specificity to each other by indicating each other.<sup>34</sup> While space connotes a sense of extendedness and expansiveness, place represents the designated and demarcated. Space is indefinite; place is particular and specific. “Place entails spatial location, entails a spatial container of some sort,” writes Buell (*Future* 63). “‘Space’ is more abstract than ‘place;’ it is “undifferentiated,” contends Tuan (6).

Construction of place, therefore, partially derives out of a shift from the abstract to the distinct, and this shift relies on the double moves of understanding and ascribing. Tuan indicates these moves when he writes, “Space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (6). Although Tuan implies an order to these events, they

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<sup>34</sup> As Buell notes, therefore, space and place are not “simple antonyms” (*Future* 63). My ideas here echo with Burke’s contextual definition in that to define a thing is to “place it in terms of something else” (*Grammar* 24).

occur recursively. To know a place is partially to know values ascribed to it and an endowment of value develops from understanding and knowledge.

Similar to Feingold's speech, narratives of wilderness rewilding function within this shift from space to place, supporting knowledge and ascribing value in an effort to construct specific places. As implied in the previous chapter, one way in which such narratives add meaning and structure place is attention to history. Place registers the past. It derives, in part, from acknowledging the past and from the organization or shaping of former events and experiences. Wallace Stegner presents this interaction between place and history by arguing, "No place is a place until things that have happened in it are remembered in history, ballads, yarns, legends, or monuments" (*Bluebird* 202). Feingold's presentation is a remembering, a creation of place by calling forth Nelson's environmental efforts and by retelling of former island inhabitants and their actions throughout previous eras.

"Attending" to history implies a wide spectrum of potential interactions. At a foundational level, Walter Brueggemann contends that a "yearning for a place is a decision to enter history" (4). As Stegner implies, to "enter history" requires both remembering and re-remembering. To recall the past is to reassemble it, to reorganize or reshape it. The entered history is the transformed history. A telling of history is not simply a retelling as much as a gathering together and ordering of aspects of the past into some form that can be conveyed to others.

As they function in a shift from space to place, narratives of wilderness rewilding perform this work of remembering and re-remembering. In short, they enter history by negotiating and re-evaluating associations between wilderness and the past. This chapter

explicates this work by juxtaposing Marilynne Robinson's novel *Housekeeping* with the rewilding narratives of William Cronon and James Feldman, allowing the different narratives to critique each other and complicate a conversation about wilderness and history. While Robinson's, Cronon's, and Feldman's narratives include aspects of an ahistorical wilderness, their writings simultaneously critique such a presentation by contending that wilderness is layered with multiple human histories. For Cronon and Feldman, this multilayered image of wilderness derives from a surface-depth hermeneutic, in which they prioritize depths over surfaces, and yet, as this chapter argues, *Housekeeping* questions this preference of depths to surfaces, presenting wilderness as a site of interactions between these elements.

### **Wilderness and Atemporality**

Wilderness and time exhibit a complex relationship. As described in section 2a of the Wilderness Act, efforts of wilderness preservation are partially future-oriented. The Act aims to "secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of wilderness." Designation of lands as "wilderness" and use and administration of such places is to occur "in such manner as will leave them unimpaired for future use." This acknowledgment of a future timeframe in the Act's reference to a prospective place for yet-to-be-born generations simultaneously implies a distance from certain contemporary events and trends. According to the Act, a future wilderness relies on separation from current and soon-to-be conditions of sites of human civilization and work. In this sense, a wilderness attempts to break from and not participate in the "increasing population" and the "expanding settlement and growing

mechanization” of civilization. By way of the Act, a wilderness designation pauses time within its bounds before developing human-based conditions can further modify the respective site. As noted in the “Prohibition of Certain Uses” and “Special Provisions” sections of the Act, already-established activities, such as mechanized travel, may continue, but may not expand.

This suspension of particular chronological changes – specifically a distance from current expressions of human civilization and its future prospects – simultaneously prompts a look backward toward a time when the land was supposedly less modified or influenced by humanity. The Wilderness Act focuses on land “retaining its primeval character and influence,” which “appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature” and thereby offers opportunities for “primitive” activities. This preference for the primitive, while not a complete dismissal of history, sidesteps many historical events and circumstances, or as Cronon argues, interpreting wilderness as a primeval place represents a “bias of historical interpretation,” a slanted view toward “earlier, ‘pioneer’ periods” (“Riddle” 42). Human habitation and work (including native histories) that seemingly do not align with images of an uninhabited and untouched land often go unmentioned, as do contemporary activities such as tourism.

Given this language in the Act, many critics conclude that the law defines wilderness as an atemporal site – or as a “flight from history,” as Cronon has it. While such arguments skirt a more nuanced discussion (such as the one above) of time and the Wilderness Act, they also recognize a propensity in the act to image lands outside the reach of particular historical developments. This chapter’s attention toward wilderness’ atemporality aims to avoid simplifying the Act’s relation to time while also arguing that

Wilderness Act rhetoric signifies a sense of timelessness or ahistoricism as it registers (or is interpreted to represent) selective eras while suppressing others. Within this understanding, wilderness' atemporality in the context of this chapter represents a possibility to step out of current concerns into an apparently timeless land or selected state of existence that has not been affected by particular chronological changes.

Robinson's novel *Housekeeping* reflects these intersections between wilderness and time by both reproduction and contestation. In part, the novel's setting echoes the Wilderness Act's presentation of a "primeval" and "primitive" location that registers the "forces of nature" more than a history of human influence. Much of the narrative takes place in north Idaho, where "uncountable mountains" surround a small town named Fingerbone (4).<sup>35</sup> The primary characters of the novel – Ruth Stone and her sister Lucille – reside just beyond the town, close to the lake, also named Fingerbone. In this location, "where there are not mountains there are hills" (4), which help constitute the "black wilderness that stretched away from Fingerbone on every side" (18). In this geographically remote wilderness setting, the town is "chastened by an outsized landscape" (62). If the size of the lake and the abundant mountains alone do not minimize humanity's past and present a location of the wild, at times their presence signifies their primacy by appearing to take over or even replace the town. When the lake freezes over, Ruth and Lucille skate to the far shore. They stop to look back at the town, but surrounded by mountains and the lake, the "town itself seemed a negligible thing from such a distance" (34). Only the presence of other skaters reminds the girls that the town

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<sup>35</sup> As noted later in the novel, the narrative is set in Idaho (165), and Fingerbone is likely modeled on Sandpoint, Idaho, a small community in the northern panhandle of the state, where Robinson was raised.

exists, and even though the mountains are “hidden in the white sky” and the lake too is “sealed and hidden,” their “eclipse” does not make the “town more prominent” (34).

This perceived diminishment or replacement of the town by aspects of nature becomes actualized when the “old lake” occasionally “returns” in the spring (5). Cellars fill with water, and the “grass will stand in chill water to its tips” (5). This inundation becomes even more dramatic when the town floods. After “three days of brilliant sunshine and four of balmy rain” the “houses and hutches and barns and sheds of Fingerbone were like so many spilled and foundered arks” (60-61). Upon reaching Ruth and Lucille’s house, the waters “poured over the thresholds and covered the floor to the depth of four inches” (61). While the prominence of the mountains and Lake Fingerbone establish a sense of the wild and of wilderness throughout the novel, the shifting perceptions, which seemingly diminish the town’s presence, and the returning lake connote a rewilding, a return of aspects deemed wild that redefine sites perceived as tamed or domesticated. To follow Gary Snyder’s explication of “wild,” the return of the old lake reestablishes an order of its own kind, it self-perpetuates according to its innate system and characteristics rather than by the presence of the town or other external influences (10-11).

While these geographic features help construct a specified and even substantial wilderness location in the novel, time is less defined and more peripheral in the narrative. That is not to say that time does not pass in the novel. Ruth and Lucille’s grandmother grows old and dies, the girls mature throughout the narrative, and other experiences reflect a procession of time. It does not imply a lack of certain time-specific aspects, for enough time references exist to construe a rough chronology of the girls’ early years.

They live with their mother, Helen, in Seattle for seven and a half years before she takes them to Fingerbone, where she leaves them at their grandmother's house before driving off a cliff into the lake and killing herself (19-22). Ruth and Lucille then live with their grandmother for five years before she dies and their great aunts, Lily and Nona, arrive to care for them (24, 29). This arrangement apparently lasts for about another four years, for when the girls' aunt Sylvie arrives, she mentions she has been away from Fingerbone for sixteen years (58). (Sylvie marries shortly after Helen and leaves Fingerbone around the same time.)

Rather than its complete absence, time is nebulous throughout the novel in the sense that the narrative occurs during some previous but undefined timeframe. Names of songs sung by the girls' mother such as "Love letters straight from your heart" and of books present in the house like *Not as a Stranger* indicate a mid-twentieth-century timeframe, but the generalized time markers throughout the novel imply a loose structure of time rather than specific years or months (196, 200). Ruth and Lucille's grandfather, Edmund Foster, leaves the Midwest "one spring" to travel west to Fingerbone (4). The only time designation for the year that Helen and her sisters leave Fingerbone is "one year" (15). The girls' grandmother dies "one winter," and Sylvie arrives "one day" during supper (29, 44). The novel's situatedness within a location defined primarily by aspects deemed natural (mountains and Lake Fingerbone) and its reach toward a previous but ambiguous time that appears as a step out of the forward flow of time, echo the implicit desire in the Wilderness Act for an atemporal setting. Similar to interpretations that present wilderness as an ahistorical site, as a place outside a significant influence of time and culture, *Housekeeping's* narrative quickly extinguishes aspects of technological

advances and symbols of cultural developments. The only car mentioned in the novel is driven into the lake early in the novel, and even though a train bridge connects Fingerbone to the world beyond, the town is better known for the derailment that took the girls' grandfather and the train he was on into the unreachable depths of Lake Fingerbone. Similar to the Act's presentation of an ahistorical wilderness, Fingerbone is a place where "the whole of human history had occurred elsewhere" (62).

William Cronon's and James Feldman's narratives of wilderness rewilding recognize the appeal of a place apparently removed from effects of time, of a chance to step into a previous era and location as portrayed in *Housekeeping* and the Wilderness Act. Their writing partially reflects the allure of places of solitude, nature, and bucolic landscapes. Commenting about the Apostle Islands, Feldman notes the region's "rustic charm," and points out that the island's old growth forest is "among the only remnant stands in the Great Lake basin" (6). Quoting a national park superintendent, Feldman presents the islands as a "snapshot" of the "original forests that once covered vast parts of [Wisconsin] and the larger Great Lakes region" (4). Cronon similarly writes that the "opportunities for solitude are easy to find. Wild nature is everywhere" (36).

### **Historicizing the Ahistorical**

Even as they reproduce tropes and images of an ahistorical wilderness that exists outside particular effects of time and culture, these narratives of rewilding by Robinson, Cronon, and Feldman contest these portrayals by presenting wilderness as a site deeply layered with human history and as a place affected by previous events and circumstances. While these narratives recognize associations between wilderness and a desire to step

beyond culture and the advancing of time into a location preserved from such influences, these accounts of wilderness also argue for a reconsideration and restructuring of relationships between histories and wilderness.

Even as the mountains and lake in *Housekeeping* structure the perception of a primitive wilderness, previous events and former inhabitants simultaneously shape this place. Although the narrative gestures toward an ambiguous past and a space seemingly removed from outside influences, they are a past and place inscribed with people and experiences in this locale. To read of Fingerbone is not only to step into a previous time and place that appears exempt from human history (it “occurred elsewhere”) but also to witness an integration of place with previous human events and experiences.

For Ruth and Lucille, this wilderness partially reflects the history of their grandfather, Edmond, and his desires and work. “It was he who put us down in this unlikely place,” Ruth explains (3). Raised in a Midwestern subterranean house, young Edmond’s passion for travel exceeds the geography of his immediate surrounds. Inspired by his reading of travel literature and painting of exotic landscapes, Edmond buys a train ticket, telling the ticket agent that “he wanted to go to the mountains” (4). Securing employment with the railroad by the time he reaches Fingerbone, Edmond builds a house, plants an orchard, and starts a family. Therefore, while the “uncountable mountains” designate an “outsized landscape” that minimizes the presence of the town, they also signify family history by representing the fulfillment of Ruth and Lucille’s grandfather’s desire for a place beyond the Midwest and by retaining the effects of Edmond’s previous work. The house remains, surrounded by orchards on three sides, and the dropped apples, apricots, and plums define this land for the girls, as much as the fluctuating lake and

surrounding mountains do (27). When Ruth and Lucille return from an overnight stay in the forest, their view takes in the orchards that contextualize their experience of this place (117).

Similar to Edmond's house and orchard, Sylvie tells Ruth about a place she has found. "It's really very pretty," Sylvie says, "there's a little valley between two hills where someone built a house and planted an orchard and even started to dig a well" (137). Convincing Ruth to go see this place, Sylvie borrows a boat, rows across the lake, and lands on a section of beach hemmed in by cliffs (150). Ruth and Sylvie walk inland through a valley gouged out by the "rampages of glaciers in their eons of slow violence" (150). Crossing a "lap of spongy earth" and a "pebbly bed left by the run-off and the rain," they find the orchard and house that Sylvie had described to Ruth (150).

Comparable to Edmond's house and orchard, this valley simultaneously registers a sense of suspended human history as well as its effects. Natural processes such as glaciers and rain define this location and emphasize natural processes, yet the history of homesteading also defines this wilderness site.

In addition to helping define this wilderness, the conditions of the trees and houses at both sites particularly signify a rewilding process. The orchard surrounding Ruth and Lucille's home is largely neglected as it fills with weeds and produces "smaller and wormier" fruit each year following Edmond's death (27). By late in the novel, the trees seem "twisted and crotched and stooped, barren and age-stricken" (117). The orchard across the lake is similarly "stunted," and snow has collapsed the house (150). As elements connected with human culture slowly give way to aspects deemed wild, this process of rewilding occurs within locations of previous human inhabitants and its effects

intermingle with remaining traces of human histories. A rewilding assumes an unwilding, or at least places interpreted as tamed and cultivated. The rewilding of these orchards does not necessitate their removal but rather a mixing with wild aspects. Rather than act as places of demarcation, sites of rewilding similar to these signify integration of wilderness and history.

The most prominent, if not the grandest, aspect of cultural history which helps define the wilderness of Fingerbone is the derailment of a “black and sleek and elegant” train called “Fireball” (6). Returning from Spokane “midway through a moonless night,” the train “had pulled more than halfway across the bridge when the engine nosed over toward the lake and then the rest of the train slid after it into the water like a weasel sliding off a rock” (6). Even though the derailment is marked as bizarre, it remains as the “most striking event in the town’s history, and as such was prized” (40). Following this tragedy, an understanding of the town of Fingerbone and its residents partially derives from the sunken train, but its derailment and submersion also become part of the lake’s definition.

Even as the lake’s consistent presence implies a sense of distance from cultural changes, and although the lake’s expansive and unpredictable waters indicate a sense of a pristine wild, untouched and outside previous events, Fireball’s derailment (along with Helen’s suicide) associates the lake with human histories. Lake Fingerbone not only reclaims gardens and lawns in acts of rewilding but also holds layers of previous cultural events within its depths.

*Housekeeping*'s dramatization of a historicized wilderness is made explicit in Cronon's and Feldman's narratives of rewilding. As with *Housekeeping*, Cronon and Feldman contend that wilderness bears much history. Their writing exhumes the past, as they insist that a present wilderness is best understood as a place shaped by previous contexts. Writing about the Apostle Islands, James Feldman argues that the wilderness of this place "is deeply layered with stories" and then proceeds to narrate histories of logging, farming, gardening, and fishing (9). Despite efforts of the National Park Service to remove traces of human history, Feldman observes that "the old farm fields remain . . . logging camps and rusting machinery still lurk in the regenerated forest" (14). For Feldman, the wilderness areas of the Apostle Islands are not abstracted "pristine" spaces but places particularized by human history and prior events, a point echoed by Cronon when he references the "mute evidence" of apple trees, lilacs, and rose bushes that indicate that this wilderness is not undifferentiated space but a place inscribed within specific characteristics ("Riddle" 39). "Nature alone cannot explain this landscape," Cronon argues, "You need history too" ("Riddle" 39).<sup>36</sup>

Throughout their rewilding narratives, Cronon and Feldman emphasize ends, leaving means implied. They argue for a clarified understanding of wilderness and hold up models of culture/ nature integration: results and products of rewilding narratives. Yet their attention to history indicates the role of memory as means for interpreting and

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<sup>36</sup> A current version of Cronon's argument and sustained commitment to historicizing wilderness occurred on October 15, 2014 when Cronon took to Facebook to defend his views against an article recent published in *Outside* that cited Cronon as a wilderness deconstructionist (Brower). "Whatever else I may be, I have never been a deconstructionist, as anyone who really understands deconstruction will surely recognize," he wrote. Rather, Cronon contended that he is "committed to a historicized view of nature and humanity," for he believes there is "value in recognizing the deep cultural traditions that are at work when we invoke the power of wilderness and nature as profound sources of meaning in our lives." For Cronon, the "cultural history of our ideas of nature and wilderness adds more than it detracts from their power. More importantly, I believe it also deepens our understanding of the many meanings they hold for us, and why different people can disagree so emphatically about them" (*Facebook*).

relating to rewilding wildernesses. Although Feldman gestures toward memory when he discusses collecting interviews in his acknowledgements, neither his narrative nor Cronon's is poised to reflect on an association between memory and wilderness. Functioning as writers of environmental history more than historiography, both scholars leave such associations as assumed modes of their work rather than approach them as aspects to be analyzed and critiqued. Such analysis is better had in Robinson's novel, for sustained images of memory in *Housekeeping* provide a context within which to consider the role of remembering in interactions with rewilding wilderness.

### **Shaping Wilderness Relations**

Contextualized as much by perished characters as by those who remain alive, by characters' attempts to understand previous family members as much as those present, *Housekeeping's* narrative contemplates actions of remembering, probing characteristics of memory and its role as an intermediary between the past and present, self and others, and humanity and wilderness. Because of his death early in the novel, Edmund exists primarily by way of memory, as his bereaved wife and daughters sustain their associations with him by retelling events and aspects of his life to others. As narrator of the novel, Ruth maintains Edmund's presence, extending the telling and memory of her grandfather. Following her mother's suicide, Ruth's mother similarly remains present as Ruth retells what others have told her and what little she can remember.

Throughout *Housekeeping*, memory sustains associations between people and conveys information between the past and the present, but the novel simultaneously attends to the characteristics of such actions, considering them to be multiple rather than

singular, and a process that transforms the past that it transfers into the present. While memories convey Ruth and Lucille's mother and transfer the girls' past with her, the girls experience that history as multivalent. Lucille recalls her mother's brown hair, and Ruth remembers it as red (43). Their mother had "swept and dusted, kept [their] anklets white, and fed [them] vitamins," but for Lucille, their mother was "orderly, vigorous, and sensible, a widow . . . who was killed in an accident" (109-110). To Ruth, their mother "tended [them] with a gentle indifference" and "she was the abandoner, and not the one abandoned" (109).

Memory transfigures the past, according to Ruth, in part because "memories are by their nature fragmented, isolated, and arbitrary" (196-198, 53). Rather than pulling on a complete whole, a past absent of conflicts and contradictions, memory draws out histories by selecting fragments and assembling partialities. As the girls collect different pieces and shape them into a form they can comprehend, histories become multiple. Memory also transforms the past as images of self intertwine with the collected fragments, a process Ruth equates with passengers she watches on a train on a wintry dark afternoon. She notes that similar to the passengers, who do not necessarily see the "black trees and the black houses, or the slender black bridge and the dim blue expanse of the lake," but rather "their own depthless images on the black glass," memories are like "glimpses one has at night through lighted windows" (54). To see the past is to see self; when Ruth and Lucille recall their mother, those memories sift through perceptions each girl possesses of their own discipline, order, and faithfulness.

Memory functions in similar fashions regarding wilderness relations in *Housekeeping*. As it structures multiple links to previous people and experiences,

transforming them by way of a reassemblage of fragments, it also functions as a means of wilderness interaction. In his work on landscape and memory, Simon Schama writes, “landscape is the work of the mind. Its scenery is built up as much from strata of memory as from layers of rock” (7).<sup>37</sup> Yet as memory transforms and constructs multiple histories, and as such histories come to inform wilderness, so wilderness too becomes multiple. As memory becomes a means of wilderness interaction, to experience wilderness is not to access an objective place, but to witness a site that derives from a shaping of the past, or as Schama writes, “it is our shaping perception that makes the difference between raw matter and landscape” (10). What is remembered is not as significant as how it is shaped – the form in which it arrives and is presented. Wilderness hinges on the “nature of representation,” not just on “content,” to adapt a point from Edward Said, for “the art of memory is very much something to be used, misused, and exploited, rather than something that sits inertly there for each person to possess and contain” (176- 179).

In *Housekeeping*, this work of memory in shaping a multivalent wilderness is most evident in contexts regarding the train derailment. At least three sources represent and remember the derailment, each constructing different interactions with Lake Fingerbone and the wilderness surrounding it. One, newspaper accounts shape Fingerbone into a place of human success and achievement. Although the novel provides no details of the initial articles that were published “as far away as Denver and St. Paul”

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<sup>37</sup> As Tim Cresswell observes, a distinction can be drawn between landscape and place. He writes, “Landscape is an intensely visual idea,” and while “places are very much things to be inside of,” with landscape, the “viewer is outside of it” (10). While acknowledging the important distinction between landscape and place, I also argue that Schama’s comments about landscape and memory equally apply to a link between place and memory, or as Philip Sheldrake claims, “If place is . . . first of all landscape, it is also memory” (16).

(5), it carefully describes the article published upon Ruth and Lucille's grandmother's death as:

a black-bordered page in the *Dispatch*, featuring photos of the train taken the day it was added to the line, and of workers hanging the bridge with crepe and wreaths, and of, in a row of gentlemen, a man identified as my grandfather. All the men in the photo wore high collars and hair combed flat across their brows. My grandfather had his lips a little parted and looked at the camera a little sidelong, and his expression seemed to be one of astonishment. (40)

The image of the train on its first day implies christening, and the picture of the workers hanging crepe and wreaths from the bridge further suggests celebration of success, of achieved milestones. The formal dress and hairstyles of the men strengthen these themes. Edmund's look of astonishment indicates his emotional response to these events, alluding to amazement of the new train and the established bridge. These photographs likely derive from different timeframes and events. The image of the train could have been taken in Seattle or Spokane, some larger city where it was added to the rail line; the crepe and wreaths could have been hung years before when the bridge was first completed, and the gentlemen might have been attending a wedding or some other event far removed from the train and bridge. Despite these likely differences, the news article gathers and reorganizes these fragments,<sup>38</sup> presents them as if they relate. Similar to the girls collecting pieces of their mother's past in their memory of her, the newspaper

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<sup>38</sup> My structure here of organization and reorganization by way of memory partially reflects Said's contention that for Cicero, "order was maintained in the memory," but a "modern art of memory is much more subject to inventive reordering" (179-180).

gathers<sup>39</sup> different objects, people, and events into a single narrative that helps structure and shape perceptions and images of this wilderness place.

The newspaper articles gesture toward public acts of memory conducted in common and shared places, and yet the association between the full-page feature in the *Dispatch* and Ruth and Lucille's grandmother's death indicates a second, but more private, way in which memories of the derailment structure wilderness interaction. While the newspapers feature moments of celebration and link Fingerbone's wilderness with human achievement, the families of the now-deceased remember the derailment and the related wilderness through expressions of mourning.<sup>40</sup>

"This catastrophe left three widows in Fingerbone," explains the novel (8). Ruth and Lucille's grandmother and the "wives of two elderly brothers who owned a dry-goods store" each lost their husbands in the derailment (8). Ruth and Lucille's grandmother remains in Fingerbone. The other women,

had lived in Fingerbone thirty years or more, but they left, one to live with a married daughter in North Dakota and the other to find any friends or kin in Sewickley, Pennsylvania, which she had left as a bride. They said they could no longer live by the lake. They said the wind smelled of it, and they

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<sup>39</sup> My use and idea of "gathering" derives from two sources: Edward Casey and Eudora Welty. In describing places, Casey contends that their creation occurs as they "gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts" (24). In her article "Place in Fiction," Eudora Welty similarly describes place as a "gathering spot" (541). Welty's argument works at a more specific register, however, for she is primarily concerned with a link between place and emotion in novelistic writing, and she presents place as a reflection of "all that has been felt" (541).

<sup>40</sup> SueEllen Campbell, in her article "Layers of Place," discusses the role of knowledge and imagination in the construction of place. Her categories provide an additional manner by which to distinguish between the actions of the newspaper and the bereaved families. The newspapers shape wilderness by providing knowledge or information about the derailment, while the mourners, especially the widows, construct wilderness through imagination.

could taste it in the drinking water, and they could not abide the smell, the taste, or the sight of it. (8-9)

In contrast to the newspaper articles that represent Fingerbone as a place of human and cultural success, the mourning of the widows shapes Fingerbone into a wilderness place of abhorrence and death. The flight of the widows to North Dakota and Pennsylvania implies that Fingerbone is a wilderness to avoid and from which to distance oneself, even if deeply-entrenched associations would argue otherwise. The widows translate Fingerbone into such a place as their grief becomes inescapable, transforming into an almost omniscient specter-like presence that affects and haunts them through sensory perceptions. Wind, water, and the lake are not inert properties to the widows but reminders of their husbands' deaths as their mourning shapes these elements and the place in which they occur into unavoidable links to the derailed train and their deceased husbands.

While the newspaper articles structure shaping of wilderness through processes of ordering and reordering, the widows' mourning constructs wilderness relations through the more amorphous element of emotion. "Places associated with death and dying . . . evoke the deepest memories and . . . stir an intensity of emotions," writes Lily Kong (xv), and I would add that the stirring of emotions in turn initiates, sustains, and informs interactions with respective places, in this case, wilderness. If a wilderness place is space that has become meaningful, memory supplies significance by arranging previous experiences and events associated with the respective locale, suggesting coherence among the gathered fragments and arousing powerful sentiments such as mourning.

In the case of the widows, while the text does not directly describe their emotional responses, the focus on their senses suggests a stirring and stimulation of emotional memories that function as means for wilderness interaction. In mourning the deaths of their husbands, the smell of the lake, the taste of it in the drinking water, and the sight of it activate something visceral within the widows.

Similar to emotions, sensory perception is connected to deep processes within the perceiver, which is implied in this passage by the drinking water, a substance that is associated, not only with the mouth and throat, but also with the stomach and digestive track. As a mourner might express “gut” emotions such as crying or moaning at the site of the death and loss, the widows deeply experience their deceased husbands through their memories of the lake, which in turn influence their current associations with the lake and its wilderness, transforming these places into sites of abhorrence and death.

The work of the newspaper articles to revive previous events and the role of the widows’ mourning to revisit significant past experiences signify acts of memorialization, a third way in which memory functions in *Housekeeping* as a means of wilderness interaction. While the newspaper articles and the mourning of the widows are primarily mental and emotional processes, memorialization situates wilderness relations within contexts of physical objects and buildings, material elements that help govern what Cresswell labels the “placing of memory” (85). Drawing from a slightly different context later in the novel, the distinction here is one of substance, with thoughts presenting a “seeming slightness,” appearing as insubstantial, not bearing “weight” nor constructed of physical, tangible materials (163). Memorialization, in contrast, suggests touchable, material objects, and in the form of a wall of stone, it bears substance and weight.

Cresswell identifies “monuments, museums, the preservation of particular buildings (and not others), plaques, inscriptions, and the promotions of whole urban neighborhoods as ‘heritage zones’” as examples of memorization (85), and the citizens of Fingerbone create similar objects and participate in comparable actions. At an unspecified time after the derailment, the citizens arrange for a

memorial service and rearing of the commemorative stone, when scores of mourners and sightseers, led by three officers of the railroad, walked out on the bridge between handrails mounted for the occasion, and dropped wreaths on the ice. (9)

Later in the novel, Sylvie recalls the service, telling Ruth, “Lots of people came in from the hills. It was like the Fourth of July, except that the bunting was black” (168). As implied in the image of the bridge – a structure that concurrently connects different points but also removes users from whatever may exist below – these acts of memorialization support interactions with wilderness, suggesting that such actions are simultaneously structured by aspects of connection and separation.

By creating contexts wherein previous experiences and events related to a respective locale may be revisited, memorialization structures points of connection to wilderness places. Visitors to memorial sites can, to a certain degree, become more fully present within a location than they were during the deaths that the site commemorates. In the case of the train derailment, the “scores of mourners and sightseers,” the railroad officers, and the people from “the hills” were not present the night of the accident, but in memorialization, they can be brought close to this place and its history as they walk out on the bridge, read the commemorative stone, and drop wreaths onto the ice. In a similar

fashion, the dead remain connected to wilderness sites through acts of memorialization. The drowned passengers are present by proxy in their engraved names on the commemorative stone, in the wreaths on the ice, and in the black bunting. To quote a line from a different context in the novel, the dead are “lost to all sense, but not perished, not perished” (160).

These aspects of connection also inform the present and undergird connections with other people. In this scene, memorialization supports the forming of associations between multiple different types of cultures and subcultures. Mourners meet with sightseers, railroad officials, and people from “the hills” atop the bridge of Fingerbone. Although their purposes for attendance differ, this event brings them to a particular locale where they might assemble around objects of memorialization and connect to a wilderness place.

As these expressions and experiences of memorialization construct a place of connection, they simultaneously create a wilderness associated with separation. The “scores” of attendees commemorate the derailment from the bridge, a site physically above the lake, and the installed handrails – acting as barriers – accentuate their distance from the lake. The presence of ice likewise represents a division between the site of the accident and the memorial crowd. Rather than dropping their wreaths into the open water where they might sink, as did the train, the wreaths remain on the ice, which has “sealed” over the lake (8), removing the train from those who wish to memorialize its absence, signifying a separation between the mourners and wilderness.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> These formalized events similarly structure a context of separation as mourners connect more with the wreaths and expectations of the commemorative experience than with wilderness aspects. As developed below, this tension between connection and separation in these early scenes plays out later in the novel as a juxtaposition of surfaces and depths.

These dramatizations point up foundational features of an interaction between wilderness rewilding and memory. As memory becomes a significant aspect of wilderness, the look backward into spaces of selected history becomes a view of a place consisting of multiple histories. As memory gathers and reassembles events and experiences of the past, wilderness becomes a process of interconnecting place with histories. Writing about place in general, Doreen Massey argues that place is fluid, that it is “absolutely not static,” for “places are processes” (66-67), and memory supports a similar understanding of wilderness. In Fingerbone, even as the residents abide in a remote and somewhat removed location, significant events and processes retrieved by memory, mourning, and memorialization – such as the derailment and the recurring flooding – punctuate the wilderness surrounding them and its perpetual rewilding with narratives, both cultural and natural.

As the newspaper accounts, the widows, and those attending the commemorative service each emphasize different threads or fragments of these processes, a rewilding wilderness becomes multiple. To quote Massey again, “places do not have single, unique ‘identities’; they are full of internal differences and conflicts” (67). For railroad officials, Fingerbone is a wilderness now bearing the achievements of human work, a perspective also reflected by the news articles, but for the widows, the deadly bridge and lake eclipse such achievements, for wilderness is a threatening site. At the memorial service, the sightseers likely experience a different version of wilderness than either the railroad officials or the mourners, and, as each group attends to different memories of this place, rearranging them toward diverse outcomes, wilderness becomes complex and

multifaceted. As Sylvie's reference to the Fourth of July implies, this wilderness bears multiple expressions and experiences – both past and present.

### **Narrating that Which Lies Beneath**

In narratives of rewilding, this sustained attention toward memory and history equates with a desire to reach beyond supposed surfaces, to apparently deeper meanings, in order to recover that which is deemed lost or obstructed from view by the presence of such surfaces. Cronon and Feldman demonstrate these movements within their surface-depth analytical structure. “On the surface,” Cronon writes, “there seems little reason to doubt that many of the Apostles meet the legal criteria specified by the 1964 Wilderness Act” (“Riddle” 36). Visitors, he argues, are apt to interpret and therefore experience the islands as “wild nature” that is “untrammelled” (36). Contesting what he views as a surface-level interpretation, Cronon writes, “And yet: the Apostle Islands also have a deep human history that has profoundly altered the “untouched” nature that visitors find here” (36-37). Using a similar argument, Feldman argues that “narratives of pristine wild nature or even nature recovering from abuse are easier to tell than those of rewilding. But such stories miss the chance to draw deeper, richer meanings from the islands” (21). For Cronon and Feldman, such deeper meanings partially derive from stories of human interaction within these wilderness places, and their writings work toward preserving these histories, keeping them from becoming lost behind surface-level narratives. In the introduction to his book, Feldman argues that the management of rewilding landscapes “depends on recognizing the stories that explain them” (21), and Cronon likewise writes

to protest actions that might “annihilate the record” of previous human presences (“Riddle” 41).

In their proposition that wilderness is constructed of layers which must be probed to best understand processes of rewilding, Cronon and Feldman employ what Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus describe as “symptomatic reading,” which views surface as that which is associated with the “superficial and deceptive, with what can be perceived without close examination and, implicitly, would turn out to be false upon closer scrutiny” (4). While they write to critique this interpretative approach, Best and Marcus trace this interpretative mode to Greek ideas that posit truth as something that “does not lie in the evidence directly available to the senses,” to Freud’s emphasis on the unconscious, and to Fredric Jameson’s argument for disclosing the absences within a text (4-5). In symptomatic reading, meaning is “hidden, repressed, deep, and in need of detection and disclosure,” and the “most significant truths are not immediately apprehensible and may be veiled or invisible” (1, 4). Within this reading paradigm, the role of interpretation is to attend to the “clues, symptoms, details on the surface that indicate the form and content of hidden depths” and restore that which has been repressed, concealed, or left latent (3-5).

As indicated above, *Housekeeping* reproduces interpretative movements akin to Cronon’s and Feldman’s symptomatic readings as the text delves beyond supposed surface-level portrayals of a primitive and pristine wilderness to retrieve aspects of the area’s history that lay latent in memories, documents, and images. Sylvie and Ruth’s trip to the abandoned homesteading site implies a search for and gathering together of clues through which the women may access or view lives otherwise lost to perception. The

events surrounding the train derailment can be associated with attempts to reach below the lake's placid waters and recall the train and the lives sunk with it or, as Ruth states, the "opening of the town's slender archives" was like an "opening of graves" (40).

The novel simultaneously questions this preference of depths to surfaces.<sup>42</sup> To return to Best and Marcus's critique of symptomatic reading, in which they argue for a "depthless hermeneutic" (12), *Housekeeping* keeps both surfaces and depths in play, attending to interactions between them rather than prioritizing one over the other. Unlike Cronon and Feldman, *Housekeeping* recognizes but does not assign a hierarchy to potential layers of knowledge and experience within wilderness places.<sup>43</sup>

The novel signifies these interactions in part by questioning access to and knowledge of what may exist beyond or beneath surfaces. The "deeps of the lake" are "lightless" and "airless," "smothered and nameless and altogether black" (9). The train becomes part of those nameless and impenetrable waters and is never found or recovered. Despite the efforts of divers, who brave the near-freezing waters of the lake, the train remains sunk in the depths of Fingerbone, and the divers retrieve only three items: a "suitcase, a seat cushion, and a lettuce" (6). One boy claims to touch a smooth surface similar to a window, but he was known to be an "ingenious liar," and his "story is neither believed nor disbelieved" (8). The lake soon becomes "dull and opaque, like cooling wax," and by "evening the lake . . . had sealed itself over" (8).<sup>44</sup> In the absence of

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<sup>42</sup> The obvious irony here is my own reading that claims some deeper meaning for the novel, that its actions and thoughts of characters point toward interpretative practices.

<sup>43</sup> To revisit a concept from the previous chapter, *Housekeeping* constructs a rhizomatic relationship between surface and depth.

<sup>44</sup> A similar interplay between surfaces and depths occurs in Ruth's description of the wardrobe, chest, and bed frame that furnish her grandmother's bedroom. When Edmond first built them, he apparently decorated each piece with painted figures, but later painted over the designs with a layer of "creamy white" paint (89-90). As the white paint fades, the images eventually "[float] . . . up just beneath the surface" (90), but like the train in the freezing lake, remain below the surface.

tangible artifacts, the newspaper accounts and commemorative service must rely on witnesses, but the accident occurred “midway through a moonless night,” and even though two men survived the wreck, “they were not really witnesses in any sense,” because the night was “impenetrable to any eye,” and they had been “standing at the end of the train looking back” (6). Without the train or reliable personal accounts of the accident, little remains to support a purported deeper understanding of the derailment; to stretch beyond the surface-level facts of the derailment is to swipe ineffectively toward unavailable knowledge and evidence, gaining little more than what was previously understood.

When evidence is available and appears to structure movements into what might be conveyed as deeper layers of understanding, such attainments are comprised more of future hopes than of current actualities. Attempting to comprehend her family’s past, Ruth sorts through a drawer holding “memorabilia, balls of twine, Christmas candles, and odd socks,” confident that the careful arrangement of these objects indicates “some large significance . . . behind the collection as a whole” (90). Ruth closely examines the age, smell, and shape of each object. A folded, second page from a brochure that feels “slick and heavy, like a page from *National Geographic*” appears of “great and obvious significance” to Ruth (90). The page presents images of barefoot children and impoverished families; the top of the page reads, “*Tens of millions in Honan Province alone,*” and “*I will make you fishers of men*” is printed at the bottom [emphasis in original] (91). To Ruth’s “whole satisfaction,” the brochure explains the departure of Molly, Ruth’s aunt, and she imagines that Molly’s work consists of sweeping a broad net

through depths and up toward the surface, a gathering that ends “all anomaly,” collects fragments and lost objects, and makes the world “comprehensible and whole” (91-92).

While such an ingathering may yet take place, it remains in the future and does little to support Ruth’s attempts to probe into what she perceives as the deeper significance of these objects. The phrase “fishers of men” might equally apply to Sylvie, who married “someone named Fisher” (15). Ruth admits that the photographs in the drawer had been taken from an album “because they were especially significant or because they were not especially significant,” and the image of the sweeping net may or may not align with Sylvie’s claim that Molly worked as a “bookkeeper in a missionary hospital” (90-92).

In scenes contextualized by wilderness rewilding, *Housekeeping* expresses a similarly skeptical position regarding access to and gathering of aspects deemed beyond surfaces. When Ruth and Lucille explore the surrounding woods, they gather strawberries in the “burned-off places” and clearings (98). They often hike to an old quarry, where they examine the remaining stone and sit in the mouth of a small cave. At the base of the quarry is an old mine that is “just a round black hole, an opening no bigger than a small well, so overgrown and rounded by grass,” a pit into which the girls look and throw things (98). As conveyed metaphorically in the girls’ presence around, but not within the depths of the cave and mine shaft, Ruth and Lucille acknowledge what exists below the surface of these sites of wilderness rewilding but remain removed from it. Physically, they do not explore the depths of the cave and mining shaft, and when they mentally reach toward significance beyond surface details, their conclusions do not necessarily help them understand the history buried in these sites. When the girls hike through the

quarry, they perceive the old stones as “ruins of an ancient civilization” rather than indications of former mining practices, and the clearings in the woods provide fertile strawberry picking, but no clues as to previous logging or farming activity.

In a similar manner, when Sylvie and Ruth row to the abandoned homestead, Ruth asks Sylvie if she has ever seen the people who are rumored to live there. “I think I have,” replies Sylvie, who then explains: “Sometimes if I think I see smoke I go walking toward it, and now and then I’m sure there are children around me. I can practically hear them” (148). If a distinction can be made between Sylvie’s definite and indefinite perceptions, with the former representing surface and the latter whatever might dwell beyond that surface, then the children of this island remain just below or outside Sylvie’s range or threshold of perception. For Ruth, the children also linger just beyond perception. While sitting on a log, waiting for Sylvie, the children “almost breathed against [her] cheek and almost touched [her] hair” (154).

Like the children, the collapsing houses signify something beyond, or in this case, within surfaces. On the far lakeshore, when Ruth tires of waiting for Sylvie, she walks to ruins of the abandoned homestead where she starts “pulling loose planks out of the cellar hole” (158). More than carrying out a random activity to stave off boredom, Ruth imagines herself as a rescuer. With “wild hope” or “desperation,” Ruth digs toward the children who had been “sleeping in this fallen house”; she searches for the “rain-stiffened hems of their nightshirts, and their small bone feet, the toes all fallen like petals” (158). When she considers her actions, it is not to question if the children are actually present (for she later admits that “there were no children trapped in this meager ruin”), but to

acknowledge that they are elsewhere, “cast out into the woods” and beyond her perceptive abilities (159).

In these negotiations of supposed wilderness surfaces and depths by way of history, *Housekeeping* dramatizes wilderness rewilding as a site bearing a past, but the narrative questions the access beyond surfaces or the ability to understand the purported deeply-layered histories beyond or beneath wilderness surfaces that might help explain its rewilding processes. This is not to say that the novel creates a rewilding wilderness as a place of erasure, where peoples and experiences of previous eras remain ignored or suppressed. The novel attends to what lies beneath but argues that a thin membrane or skin (or an opaque layer of wax – to use the image of the freezing lake again) remains stretched across artifacts and elements of the past. According to the novel, wilderness depths affect surfaces, but surfaces occlude a clear vision beyond themselves. Of course, to remain consistent with *Housekeeping*'s rendering of wilderness, such a reading is likely a scratching at images that inevitably remain out of reach.

## **Chapter Four** **(Re)Casting Rewilding in Terry Tempest Williams's *Refuge***

For William Cronon and James Feldman, narratives of rewilding present constructive movements in which natural aspects professed as wild exhibit a return after their previous removal, elimination, or displacement by humanity. The 1930s “logging- and fire-scarred wasteland” of the Apostle Islands now is a place seen as “whole and healthy,” a site which demonstrates “ecological integrity” (Feldman 9, 4). Areas formerly cleared by logging now thrive with a returning forest; quarried and exposed rock now blends together with traipsing foliage. In celebrating the 2004 transition from the Apostle Islands National Lakeshore to the creation of the Gaylord Nelson Wilderness, Cronon and Feldman illustrate their perspective that rewilding equates with beneficial processes, that the return of trees, animals, and other aspects of what might be deemed natural signifies a return of favorable conditions.

The imaginative works considered in this project gesture toward benefits of rewilding, but their narratives also attend to alternative ramifications of rewilding. One perspective, as the second chapter demonstrates, casts rewilding as a hollow reenactment, a meaningful but failing attempt to reinstate wild and wilderness-like conditions. According to this position, states of rewilding may be achieved, but they remain paltry or tempered in their attempt to remake a damaged world and humanity. A related, but second and distinct perspective, presents rewilding as detrimental to human welfare. Rather than envisioning rewilding locations as resources for human betterment, this interpretation, presented in chapter three, portrays these sites as signifying erasure, where

humanity, its work, and its history encounter decay and loss.<sup>45</sup> A third position augments the first two by perceiving rewilded locales as constructed places of absence, but as chapter four argues, rewilding locations also bear a sustained presence of things lost through memory, mourning, and memorialization.<sup>46</sup>

This final chapter similarly attends to a variant narrative of rewilding in Terry Tempest Williams's work *Refuge*, which portrays the return of former conditions, not as desirable and beneficial, but as unwelcomed and even dangerous. Part memoir and part nature writing, this 1991 book recounts the stages of two events: the rising levels of the Great Salt Lake in the 1980s and the concurrent experiences of Williams's family as they wrestle with cancer and ultimately death. The flooding waters, which transform streets into rivers and the tepid Great Salt Lake into a surging lake akin to its ancient predecessor Lake Bonneville, represent loss and absence for Williams. The rising lake submerges access routes to her sites of bird observations and wilderness experiences, and when its waters flood the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, countless birds are displaced, removing Williams from her much-loved place of solitude and spiritual refreshment. For Williams, these effects of rewilding are particularly acute as she intertwines the narratives of flooding and cancer, viewing the rising waters as a developing tumor and the effects on the land as analogous to the ravaging effects of cancer.

*Refuge* also augments the three previous narratives of rewilding by portraying a sustained response to rewilding. If the first three chapters demonstrate initial reactions to

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<sup>45</sup> Geoffrey Harpham's presentation of asceticism offers an equally effective read of John Grady's erasure. The impulse to lose self also registers an ascetic movement, which Harpham defines in a loose sense as a "strategy of empowerment or gratification" (xiii). This positive swing of self-diminishment represents an "urge for transcendence," which highlights a desire to step beyond, or as I argue in chapter three, a movement toward intertwining with elements outside the self.

<sup>46</sup> While not working strictly within a linear arrangement, these middle chapters of the project – on erasure and memory – suggest corresponding movements within and relations to rewilding wildernesses.

rewilding, *Refuge* displays long-term adaptations. This chapter argues that Williams seeks new postures or positions within the rewilding land and ultimately shifts inward. As she is cut off from sites she deems as wilderness, she contends that wilderness may still be experienced by way of emotional conditions. While wilderness references physical conditions and psychological experiences, this chapter explicates how Williams's narrative demonstrates a propensity of rewilding to separate these two aspects of wilderness and to posit it primarily as an emotional, psychological, and spiritual experience.

### **Presentation and Presence of Wilderness**

Terry Tempest Williams evokes wilderness throughout her narrative more than any other type of land. The use and reliance on this geographic categorization arises in part from a legal designation, as when Williams references the Teton Wilderness in northwest Wyoming or the Dark Canyon Wilderness in southeast Utah (55, 242-244).<sup>47</sup> Such governmentally-sanctioned lands receive little attention in Williams's narrative. Rather, wilderness primarily exists throughout the text by way of geographic features and physical attributes of the lands in which Williams and her family live and travel that imply wilderness-like settings. When visiting Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge, Williams notes the "stillness of the desert" (109), and walking through the "forsaken corners" north of the Great Salt Lake, she perceives the area as the "throbbing silence of the Great Basin" (148). These labels of quiet and calm correspond with and augment

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<sup>47</sup> The process of a legal recognition of the Teton Wilderness dates to 1934, when the efforts of advocates such as Olaus Murie and Bob Marshall resulted in a designation of a primitive area. The passing of the Wilderness Act in 1964 identified over 500,000 acres as official wilderness area (Molvar 49). The Dark Canyon Wilderness derived from the 1984 Utah Wilderness Act and was the "first major Colorado Plateau Canyon terrain" to be recognized as a legal wilderness area (*wilderness.net*).

Williams's portrayal of the red desert of Utah as "vast" and as a "blank spot on the map" (241-244),<sup>48</sup> as a site without "trains or planes" (169). More than a condition of remoteness or isolation, Williams in turn interprets such stillness and openness as severe and "stark" (148, 158), and outside Brigham City she translates her surroundings as hostile (147).

Starkness, vastness, and stillness in and of themselves do not necessarily comprise wilderness, nor do they, by default, equal such a place. Land throughout northern Utah may be considered stark or without significant features, but given the presence of farming and other human activities, few would argue that every aspect of this area equates with wilderness. Similarly, a sagebrush prairie in eastern Utah could be viewed as vast and still, but given the cattle ranching and mining that occur throughout the area, not many would perceive this location as constituting wilderness.

Taken together, however, such attributes signify wilderness and wilderness-like conditions throughout Williams's narrative. To reach Fish Springs National Wildlife Refuge, Williams must travel four hours west of Salt Lake City to an area marked more by the ancient water lines of Lake Bonneville and the presence of multiple species of birds than by the fading Pony Express Trail or by the previously-used military bomb site north of the refuge (108-109). Eighty miles from a grocery store or gas station, the refuge remains isolated from human civilization<sup>49</sup> and provides Williams with the solitude she seeks (city-data.com). In a similar passage, during Williams's travels to the Salt Well

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<sup>48</sup> Williams's intertextual echo of Aldo Leopold's "blank spot on the map" bolsters her presentation of wilderness. Leopold writes of a "blank spot on the map" within a context of speaking directly about wilderness and "wild country," and her direct quote of Leopold suggests a similar setting (157-158).

<sup>49</sup> While the wildlife refuge might offer Williams a space seemingly separate from other humans, it belies its connection to humanity as a creation of human advocacy and legislation. See below for a developed discussion of this relationship between wilderness-as-land and wilderness-as-perception.

Flats, this land in northwestern Utah not only represents hostile terrain but also a site where the land stretches out across miles of non-arable and unoccupied space (148).

More than a direct reference, Williams in these passages indicates wilderness through an association of multiple characteristics. In clustering such attributes, Williams achieves more than a single geographic or land category and gestures toward a complex range of characteristics that help define and coalesce into a perception of wilderness.

The few instances in which Williams directly uses the label “wilderness” clarify a relation between these associative clusters and wilderness. In discussing land north of the Great Salt Lake, Williams notes the severe and stark conditions of heat and sun glare. Playing off the idea of a land with little useable water and a place of much exposure, she turns to contemplating desert conditions and identifying her current location as such a site. The final section of the passage begins as Williams moves into a different, but related commentary on Jesus in the wilderness (148). With “wilderness” occurring in the latter section of the passage, the preceding land characteristics build toward and act as connotations or assembled support for Williams’s concluding remarks about this place. As the accumulating depictions lead toward it, the identifier “wilderness” also informs the descriptors before it, equating severity, starkness, limited water, and desert conditions with wilderness.

A similar version of an interrelation between wilderness and these associative clusters occurs later in the text as Williams describes her trip to Dark Canyon. Although Dark Canyon represents a legally defined wilderness area, Williams does not clearly identify it as such in her description, preferring the labels of “remote area” and “primitive

area” (242).<sup>50</sup> As with the previous passage, Williams introduces the term “wilderness” at the end of the section, where she writes, “A blank spot on the map is an invitation to encounter the natural world, where one’s character will be shaped by the landscape. To enter wilderness is to court risk, and risk favors the senses, enabling one to live well” (244). Similar to “severity” and “starkness” in the passage above, “remote,” “primitive,” and “blank,” act as adjectives of wilderness. Even though they function to modify the noun in their immediate context, when considered within the passage as a whole, they also work toward depicting and supporting concepts of wilderness.

The links between the different associative terms remain loose. Williams leaves the transitions between subsections in both passages undeveloped, a structure that implies her subjective train of thought more than an official recognition of or proclamation about the land. In the absence of a set relation between terms or an established identity of these sites, wilderness – as a term and concept – remains at play. This textual structure implies that Williams aims to accomplish more than an accurate label for the land around her, and it implies that her use of wilderness serves some other purpose or end in her narrative.

The Dark Canyon passage suggests one possible purpose. In downplaying and suppressing the legal identification of Dark Canyon as a wilderness area, Williams foregrounds and emphasizes her experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of this place; in introducing wilderness at the end of the section, it comes by way of her experiences and is inevitably tethered to them. Not strictly functioning as an accurate topographical or geological marker, wilderness in this passage signifies a set range of

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<sup>50</sup> Williams’s use of “primitive area” seems more linked with “remote area” than the official, legal designation. Legally, “primitive area” predates “wilderness area” and was used first in 1929 (Jenkins 3). Today, a primitive area indicates wilderness-like lands that do not fully qualify as wilderness because of present “structures, improvements, or uses,” or connection to other private lands, or because their size does not meet wilderness standards ([apa.ny.gov](http://apa.ny.gov)).

expected experiences. Stated differently, outside a select few references to legally defined wilderness areas in Williams's text, wilderness primarily functions as a script to stage or frame desired responses to and needs for such places.

One range of experiences derives from the expectations and needs of Williams's mother, Diane, as she endures the diagnosis and treatment of cancer. Before initially seeing a doctor, Diane leaves Salt Lake City to spend a month in the wilderness-like desert of southern Utah. She describes lying on the red rocks and letting the heat of the rocks penetrate her skin as the "desert light bathed [her] soul" (29). She travels through the "inner gorge of Vishnu schist, the oldest exposed rock in the West" and finds a perspective from which to face the coming months of surgery and treatment (29). Her time in the desert represents a "meditation" and "renewal," and in "its solitude" she locates a "strength" that remains with her after returning to the city (29).

Without claiming a comprehensive understanding of Diane's thoughts or decisions, an argument that she seeks out and travels into a wilderness-like area for particular reasons remains valid. Even if red rocks and Vishnu schist are present in Salt Lake City, and even if the city receives light and heat from the same sun as the desert, the urban location precludes the experience Diane seeks. Although similar geographic features and climate conditions might be present in both city and wilderness, the location of such aspects conditions the response and experience. Stated simply, place determines action; it declares what can and cannot likely occur. For Diane, soul bathing and meditating in solitude to achieve perspective, renewal, and strength requires wilderness.

In these terms, wilderness functions similarly to Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of a chronotope. Translated as "time space," Bakhtin explains chronotope as the "intrinsic

connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature” (84). The narrative or story, in other words, is bound up with space and time, or, as Bakhtin explains, a chronotope is “the ground essential for the showing forth, the representability of events” (250). To shift space or time is to shift events, and to establish place and time is to delineate events. As Liisa Steinby understands it, “for Bakhtin a chronotope . . . determines what the persons ‘belonging’ to that chronotope can experience and how they can act”; a chronotope establishes what can occur (120). In Diane’s case, her desired experiences fall within the purview of wilderness; therefore, she seeks out such a location while also designating it as such a place.

Similar to her mother, Williams also employs this move of attribution-to-support-expected-experience. Like Diane, Williams too seeks strength and renewal, understands these experiences to derive from wilderness, and locates herself in wilderness-like settings while simultaneously supplying a matching label for her surrounds. Worn down by her mother’s cancer, Williams leaves for southern Utah to participate in an archaeological dig in Anasazi State Park. She reports the experience as such: “With the wind billowing my white cotton blouse, I breathe with a clarity of spirit I have not known for months” (167). She finds renewal in the trees, sage, and earth, and like her mother, the heat and light of the sun on her skin signifies a rebuilding of her strength. Though not recognized as a legal wilderness, Williams supplies that label later in the passage, an identifying mark to match her needed and expected experiences. In a similar manner, after her mother’s death Williams seeks out a desert cave near the Great Salt Lake where she is “hidden and saved from the outside world” (237). She rests in the cave, a place she identifies as “the secret den of my healing” (237).

Even as both passages register Williams's desire for strength and renewal, they also represent her looking to wilderness as a way of escape. Upon learning that her mother's cancer has returned, Williams overtly states this intent when she writes, "I fled for Bear River" (68). Her trip to Anasazi State Park similarly represents a release from the struggles of her mother's cancer, while her desert cave signifies removal and a shielding from the "outside world" (237).

In each of the three above contexts, escape connotes a physical and topographical movement away from a particular location (in these cases, Salt Lake City) and a transition toward a different and removed site, which is understood to be wilderness in each case. Yet movement and escape for Williams pertains to more than transitions across geographical space, for in other instances, her use of and desire for escape also reflect a pursuit of changes in being. Similar to Ruth's experience on the lake island in *Housekeeping*, escape for Williams also denotes a lessening of being, an undoing, or dissolving of a current state of being en route to a preferred expression of existence. After traveling to Fish Springs, Williams locates sand dunes beyond the wildlife refuge and settles into her sleeping bag for the night, and, much like Ruth seeking to be "unhoused" from her flesh (159), Williams implores, "Let me lie naked and disappear" (109). To whom she addresses her request remains unclear, but if read alongside the desert cave passage, Williams's wish for a modification in being is another version of stepping away from the "outside world" to become hidden and safe from difficulties "out there."

To borrow from Kenneth Burke again, Williams's disappearing and shifts in being take place consubstantially, or by way of what she is part of and what is part of her. Her sleeping spot on the sand dunes represents not just a site of rest, but also an intimate

proximity to a place to enter into the elements around her. She writes, “The wind rolls over me. Particles of sand skitter across my skin, fill my ears and nose” (109). The movement in the passage from “over” and “across” to “fill” represents a shift from the external to the internal. What is initially separate and distinct intertwines as Williams becomes not only aware of the wind and sand but also defined and constituted by them.

As Williams perceives the boundaries of her self as permeable, so she views the wind, sand, and other elements, which give way to, intermingle with, or diffuse into something sacred. She understands the “natural world” to possess “spiritual values,” and that a sense of deity may be found “wherever you are, especially outside” (14). In Williams’s family, “worship was not just relegated to Sunday in a chapel,” for “those days spent in wildness were sacred” (14). To disappear into sand dunes or to crawl into a hidden desert cave signals a shift into a highly revered place or form of existence for Williams, and to escape designates not only a departure *away from* but also transition *toward* and *into* some other physical, psychological, and/or spiritual site. To Williams, wilderness “courts our souls,” and is an opportunity for a “pilgrimage” that “allows us to remember the sacred” (148).

### **The Great Salt Lake: A Watery Wilderness**

Throughout these experiences, Williams translates wilderness not only as physical locations but also as psychological responses. For Williams, an emotional or mental response constitutes wilderness as much as physical, geographical features do. The two (psychological and physical) exist as intertwined, each giving way to the other, and in Williams’s experiences, it remains difficult to parse out exactly if physical features

prompt emotional response or if emotional desires initiate reciprocal renderings of physical sites. Constituted as such, wilderness as a category becomes open and flexible, pliable in diverse locations, allowing Williams to translate not only the rugged canyons and red deserts in southern Utah or the barren land around the Great Salt Lake as wilderness but also the lake itself as a wilderness site.<sup>51</sup>

Located to the west and north of Salt Lake City, the Great Salt Lake is the largest body of water west of the Mississippi (Utah.com). Covering approximately 2500 square miles, it occupies more geographic space than either Rhode Island or Delaware. The lake, however, is best known for its salinity. Along with other smaller sources, three primary tributaries, the Bear River, the Weber River, and the Jordan River, supply the lake's water and mineral content (Morgan 22). As a terminal lake, the minerals remain, and when coupled with a high evaporation rate, the lake averages a saline content of about twelve percent (Utah.com). Such conditions prompt Dale Morgan to conclude that the lake is "more desert than a desert" (17). Throughout her narrative, Williams concurs with Morgan, as she approaches the lake not only as a desert but also as a wilderness, expecting her experiences to emulate her time spent in other terrestrial wilderness areas.

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<sup>51</sup> Associations between terrestrial and aqueous wilderness sites are not original to Williams. To cite the previous chapter, Robinson presents Fingerbone Lake as a wilderness, and comparisons between the wilderness-like conditions of the prairie and the ocean occur throughout American literary history. In his "A Tour on the Prairies," Washington Irving likens a thunder storm on the prairies to one on the ocean, for in both settings the storm "rages and bellows" over the "grandeur and sublimity" of the "wild and boundless waste" (79). Roughly eighty years later, Willa Cather writes of the great open expanses of the land in eastern Nebraska and correlates the motion of the prairie grasses to the subtle waves of the sea in *My Ántonia* (12). In a contemporary context, Jonathan Raban begins his book *Bad Land* by comparing his car's movement over the remote roads of Montana's eastern prairies to a "boat at sea" (1). Beyond this literary history, current environmental voices, such as The Wild Foundation, argue that ideas of wilderness should apply equally to marine environments as a way to grant similar protection to oceans. The inverse of this argument may be found in Gary Kroll's work, *America's Ocean Wilderness*, in which he argues that the decline of oceans throughout the twentieth-century derives from imaging them as a new wilderness frontier.

Similar to the sand dunes beyond Fish Springs, Williams translates the Great Salt Lake as a wilderness site within which she can disappear. As she settles into the sand, so she slips into the salty waters. Early in her narrative, she takes her mother swimming, where they “drifted for hours” and became merged with “salt water and sky so completely” that they were “resolved, dissolved, in peace” (78). This trip occurs on the afternoon of Diane’s first radiation treatment, and like the time at Fish Springs, the swimming trip and movement toward disappearance partially represent an attempt to step away and be hidden from these difficulties of the “outside world.” To merge with water and sky is to slip out of and away from the cancer, its treatment, and related concerns.

This movement into a removed site, as with Williams’s time in Anasazi State Park, is viewed not only as a retreat but also as a progression into strength and renewal. While the drifting and merging of her swimming trip suggest more of the former, in other instances Williams arrives at the lake to access a sense of potency. During a winter walk along the lake’s shore, Williams desires to see the lake as a woman who refuses to be tamed and as a force that is “raw and self-defined” (92). “The State of Utah may try to dike her, divert her water, build roads across her shores, but ultimately, it won’t matter. She will survive us,” Williams writes (92). Williams’s interpretative actions in this passage do more than support a rendering of the lake as feminine and as a wilderness, for as Williams views the lake, so she desires to perceive herself. To define her surroundings as wilderness – as “self-willed” – is to define herself. Her perception of the lake sets up both a desired locale and state of being in which Williams might exist and be defined.

Viewed as wilderness, the element of water accentuates Williams’s desire for and translation of wilderness as a permeable place capable of supporting consubstantial

shiftings. Late in her narrative, preferring the Great Salt Lake to a Mormon international meeting in Salt Lake City, Williams drives out to the lake. Arriving, she watches the wind and waves, and feeling their rhythm like “like African drums,” she is “spun, supported, and possessed by the spirit who dwells” there (240). She tastes salt on her lips and feels moisture on her hands. Licking her fingers, she takes in the salt and water as the “smell of brine is burning in [her] lungs” (240). She closes her eyes, gives way to the wind and waves, and with a “sigh and a surge,” slips into their embrace like a lover (240).

While Williams’s consubstantial movements at Fish Springs remain passive (Williams lies still as wind and sand roll over her), in this passage, she adopts a more active role, aggressively pursuing the elements around her, sensually responding to their presence. Through sight, smell, and taste, Williams flows in and out of the water and winds of the Great Salt Lake; she positions herself not only as permeable, as open to the wind and waves, but also as an active participant in their existence. The final upshot or effect remains similar however. As her intertwining with the sand dunes leads Williams into a spiritual state, she translates the experience as an encounter with a divine presence. Williams’s dancing and spinning represent not only an intimate experience with the wind and the waves but also an enmeshing with the spirit of this place.

By perceiving and interacting with the Great Salt Lake in ways similar to other terrestrial wilderness areas throughout Utah, Williams implies a correlation between land and water. For Williams, the lake’s waves equate with the red rocks of the desert and the sands of the dunes compare with the waters of the lake. While much of Williams’s perception of the lake as a wilderness rests on such comparative associations, two direct

statements, in which Williams clearly labels the Great Salt Lake as wilderness, solidifies and makes her interpretation of the lake more overt.

Following her expressed desire, “I want to see the lake as Woman,” Williams writes, “I recognize her as a wilderness” (92). As with the other sections in which Williams evokes wilderness, this use of land categorization exists in tension between her desires and the geographic features of the location around her. The “I” in both sentences marks her involvement, her role in defining the lake. The “want” of the first sentence evinces desire, an aspiration or goal, and such an aim remains implied in the second sentence. At the same time, with “recognize,” Williams records features of the lake external to her personal desires and interpretations. To recognize is not only to mark personal investment but also to acknowledge associations with categories beyond or outside subjective response. Recognizing wilderness requires matching it with other locales and conditions. An “amplified” or expanded translation of Williams’s “I recognize her as a wilderness,” might read, “In my interaction with the Great Salt Lake, I find myself thinking of it as a wilderness. It prompts memories of other wilderness areas and experiences; it calls me back to wilderness and calls forth my desire for such places.”

Williams’s most explicit “recognition” or presentation of the Great Salt Lake as wilderness occurs early in her narrative when she writes, “Great Salt Lake: wilderness adjacent to a city; a shifting shoreline that plays havoc with highways; islands too stark, too remote to inhabit; water in the desert that no one can drink. It is the liquid lie of the West” (5). In contrast to her other direct label of the lake as wilderness, Williams downplays her personal presence throughout this passage. No “I” registers her involvement in this extended definition, and no “want” implies her desire. Her position

here remains that of an unmarked author, but a consistent sentiment or vision of wilderness reveals Williams's position throughout this passage.

Similar to her other interpretations of wilderness areas, in this passage Williams presents the Great Salt lake as a removed site. Despite its location near Salt Lake City, Williams assigns distance between the two by establishing an adjacency where each occupies a distinct and separate locale. Presenting the lake's islands as "remote" underscores the characteristic of a separated place, while noting a lack of inhabitants and the undrinkable water further distinguishes the lake from Salt Lake City. In its salinity, the lake remains beyond the realm of the city, "outside" its purposes for drinking water; in spite of its appearance as an abundant water source, it lies or does not correlate with the city's purposes. For Williams, the lake and city remain geographically close, yet differing purposes and possibilities pertaining to human habitation separate the two.

This contrast between city and lake also pertains to Williams's frequent association of wilderness with strength. In spite of the highways that run along its southern and eastern shores, the lake's waters fluctuate according to its own properties and characteristics. The roads do not bind, constrain, or weaken the lake, and despite the apparent stability of asphalt, the waters "play havoc" with the roads and prove to be the more durable and influential of the two. In the lake's effect on the roads and in its insusceptibility to the highway's presence, the lake retains its strength as if self-willed, governed by its own properties rather than by another's.

This attention toward the lake's fluctuating shoreline undergirds Williams's presentation of wilderness areas as sites of consubstantial shiftings. As implied earlier, with no outlet, the melting snow and rains of spring and early summer can dramatically

expand the lake's boundaries, which then potentially contract again through evaporation during a dry and hot season. Williams explains, "Since Captain Howard Stansbury's *Exploration and Survey of the Great Salt Lake, 1852*, the water level has varied by as much as twenty feet, altering the shoreline in some places by as much as fifteen miles" (7). Absorbing and giving way, taking in and releasing: such are the experiences sought by Williams as she enters into wilderness. As the lake continually interacts with conditions and elements surrounding it, transitioning into some other shape or state of being, so Williams seeks to absorb sand, wind, and water in moments of releasing her struggles and thereby being reshaped again.

Taken as a whole, considering both the terrestrial and the aqueous, wilderness signifies a transitional site to Williams. Viewed as geographically separate from Salt Lake City and as distant from her mother's struggles with cancer, wilderness is perceived by Williams as a way to physically step into a realm not defined by her present concerns. To counter the influence of grief and pain, Williams moves into areas she identifies as wilderness where elements of sand and water, rock and waves affect and mold her psychic and spiritual state of being. Williams finds renewal in such movements. In shifting across boundaries into a place deemed wilderness, Williams locates a life beyond her own and intertwines herself with that source of strength.

### **Acts of Attribution and Appropriation**

To state that Williams "finds" or "locates" particular experiences or specific effects of wilderness implies that such conditions reside as pre-established, that they inevitably exist as intrinsic properties of wilderness. As implied in previous chapters, the

entrenched influence of prominent narrative and rhetorical patterns of wilderness partially warrant this reading of Williams's actions. When Williams ventures forth into wilderness, she discovers a congruency among the environments around her and the lands presented as wilderness for hundreds of years before her, and she situates her self and her experiences within that extended tradition of wilderness understanding. Williams's trip to Anasazi State Park and her "reverie" amidst the wind, trees, and sun replay and rediscover experiences akin to John Muir's in the Sierra Mountains as he reveled in trees and relished features of the land around him. When Williams disappears and slips into wilderness sand or water, these actions and desires can be traced to Ralph Waldo Emerson's idea of a transparent eyeball and Aldo Leopold's submersion into a muskrat house in order to observe ducks.

Williams's interaction with wilderness is not singular. Similar to Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, this reading of Williams and wilderness emphasizes the objective and the preexistent, but it does not preclude other actions. Although Williams finds or locates cultural constructs in her wilderness, her recognition of and participation in these narratives constitutes attribution. As described above, by naming a site as wilderness and by carrying out actions related to wilderness experiences, Williams assigns and links respective locales to a wilderness narrative tradition. The land around her and the extensive literary tradition of wilderness writing do not inevitably correlate, but their association takes shape as Williams links land to a particular cultural understanding that she desires and finds advantageous.

To extend analysis of this subjective action further, Williams's interaction with wilderness signifies appropriation. More than assigning the Great Salt Lake or a desert in

southern Utah to a shared and public tradition of wilderness narrative, Williams designates these locations as means toward her desired and individual ends.<sup>52</sup> In seeking out strength and renewal in water, sand, and rock, Williams makes these elements over to satisfy and conform to her needs.

Williams is not alone in her appropriation of wilderness, and a history of wilderness might be constructed through a frame of various appropriations. In his work, *Puritanism and the Wilderness*, Peter Carroll contends that Puritan leaders assigned wilderness toward two contradictory ends: as a means of enclosure and community cohesion and as a space wherein to carry out what they inferred as a divine mandate to settle and subdue the earth (3). These inclinations for settlement and sustenance also informed exploration, westward movement, and use of land west of the 100<sup>th</sup> meridian throughout the nineteenth-century. Locations that were seen as a wilderness and named the Great American Desert by Stephen Long in 1820 were later presented as fertile lands and renamed the Great Plains to encourage farming and settlement throughout the area (Egan 22).

As the shift to farming in the Great Plains implies, defining and appropriating wilderness relates to economic concerns and class structures. To understand a wilderness ethos, argues Lisi Krall, requires attending to correlating developments in the market economy (85). While nature was recognized as a needed counter to the demands and pressures of urban industrial life throughout the nineteenth-century, the form and access to nature were divided among economic classes. Those benefited by the industrial revolution “had the ability to escape the urban centers, a luxury not open to the working

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<sup>52</sup> At times, Williams’s appropriation of wilderness borders on possession, as when she writes “the burrowing owls five miles from the entrance to the Bear River Migratory Refuge are mine” (8), or when she states, “My world was my own creation. It still is” (177).

class who were involved in the day-to-day toil of economic survival,” writes Krall (91). For the working class bound to the city, nature came by way of urban parks, while “economic development offered the upper class – and later the elite middle class – a greater opportunity to explore . . . wilderness” (92-93).

Williams’s access to and appropriation of wilderness reflect these economic and class elements of wilderness. As a child, Williams and her family spent weekends “camped alongside a small stream in the Great Basin, in the Stansbury Mountains or Deep Creeks,” and at the age of ten, Williams and her grandmother participated in a special trip, organized by the Audubon Society, to monitor birds at the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge (15-20). The socioeconomic status of Williams and her family underwrote these childhood activities. The success of her father’s pipe-laying company provided the financial resources and time for leisure to routinely access wilderness areas throughout Utah. Not tethered to a livelihood dependent upon the land, the family translates these camping spots and observatories as set aside, preserved as wilderness, for their recreational benefit.

Similar economic privilege extends into Williams’s adult and working life as well. She shops with her mother at Nordstrom’s, and they take trips to New York City, where they sleep late, enjoy downtown cafés, and shop in the “finest stores”; they tour museums and arrange for a trip to Bloomingdale’s salon before an evening at the theater (24-25). Perhaps these trips and shopping experiences represent unique events or vacations and do not indicate typical expenditures in Williams’s life. Without over-generalizing these examples as a statement about the entirety of her economic status, they

do imply financial and time resources which also support Williams's interaction with wilderness.

For Williams, these finances and time resources do not solely derive from her family, but also from her position at the Utah Museum of Natural History. Williams introduces her work for the museum early in her narrative and contextualizes it with a daydreaming experience. "I caught myself staring out the window again. Last time I looked at the clock it was 11:20 A.M. Now it is 12:30," she writes (42). From her upper story office, Williams looks out above the city to watch birds and observe the Wasatch Mountains in the distance (42). The time reference and Williams's stare out her window figuratively indicate the association between her employment and her connection to wilderness. As Williams's position grants her extended periods of time to visually step out of her office and be present with birds and mountains, it provides similar means of a larger scale for Williams to be physically present in wilderness.

In part, access to wilderness and the required time for travel directly correlate with her responsibilities for field work. In her position, Williams travels to the West Desert (126), to an archaeological dig at Anasazi State Park in southern Utah (166), to Floating Island, west of the Great Salt Lake (179), and to the Tetons in northwest Wyoming for an extended backpacking trip (244). Her position also supplies the resources for excursions not related to her job: an eight-day trip to Tepotzlán, Mexico, where she celebrates the Day of the Dead (276), a hiking trip into Black Steer Canyon in southeastern Utah (242), and regular excursions to the Great Salt Lake and the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge.

Throughout her narrative, Williams notes numerous and frequent trips to the Great Salt Lake. Perhaps aware of the resources required for this trip,<sup>53</sup> Williams begins the first chapter of *Refuge* with a detailed account of the twenty-five minute drive between her house and the lake. From her house near Emigration Canyon, east of Salt Lake City, Williams drives past the University of Utah, through Salt Lake City, and west toward the airport (5). When not driving to the Great Salt Lake, Williams travels to the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, which from “Salt Lake City takes a little over one hour” (10). The frequency of these trips, along with the required gas and reliable transportation, indicate Williams’s privileged economic means, but they also point to the time her socioeconomic status grants her.

Williams’s situatedness<sup>54</sup> within wilderness stems partially from her participation in a long-standing cultural discourse about wilderness, and partially from her actions to apply or impute this discourse to the land around her. Both the given and the adaptation of it direct her interaction with wilderness, and both depend on available means and time. This situatedness or arrangement of land relations also depends on environmental conditions, on characteristics and qualities of land that support and make this interaction possible.

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<sup>53</sup> Williams does not provide an overt acknowledgement of her privileged position in *Refuge*; it remains as a subtext without comment, but in the September/ October 2014 issue of *Orion*, she writes, “Yes, our ability to travel here is a privilege. But it is also a choice. . . . Wilderness is not my leisure or recreation. It is my sanity” (52). Williams recognizes the financial requirements of wilderness experience but does not continue her introspection to analyze how her financial privileges affect her interpretation of and interaction with wilderness.

<sup>54</sup> These ideas partially reflect David Simpson’s work in his book *Situatedness*, where he contends that situations include “outside forces that influence subjectivity. . . . But they are also open to . . . responses or reactions. . . . [Situations] are given to us but also open to amendment” (20).

## **Rewilding: Locations of Loss**

In the spring of 1983, Williams's expected wilderness conditions became unpredictable and her desired experiences became unattainable. While the rocky Wasatch Mountains, west of Salt Lake City, and the Bonneville Salt Flats, to the east signify the typically arid conditions of this geographical location, an above-average snow pack combined with record-level rainfall and quickly rising temperatures in the spring of 1983 to produce flooding conditions throughout the Salt Lake Valley. Meager streams transformed into over-flowing rivers, tepid lakes into small seas, and city streets into canals. Williams's access points into wilderness west of the city eroded under the expanding rivers, and the elevated water levels radically transformed sites, such as the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, that Williams valued as wilderness.

The events of 1983 derived from meteorological and hydrological conditions of the previous year. Salt Lake City averages less than two inches of moisture in any given month, and this geographical area typically receives around 16 inches of rain and snow over the course of an entire year (weatherdb.com). The record-setting water year of 1982,<sup>55</sup> peaked during September 1982 when the area witnessed more than ten inches of rain (weatherdb.com). Through the spring of 1983, the area continued to receive unusual amounts of rain and snow, and in March, record levels of moisture occurred again (Sillitoe). Snow accumulated through the end of May, when temperatures rose sharply into the 80s and 90s, sending dangerous amounts of melted snow into the area's streams that were already at capacity (Sillitoe).

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<sup>55</sup> A weather year measures moisture received from October 1<sup>st</sup> through September 30<sup>th</sup> of the following year and is named for the year in which nine of the months occur (water.usgs.gov).

Throughout Big and Little Cottonwood Canyons (both in the Wasatch Mountains) surging water now defined sites formerly identified as places of habitation and transportation. In April 1983, a lake formed over the small mountain town of Thistle when mudslides dammed the Spanish Fork River (Starbuck). In Salt Lake City, by the end of May, newly formed rivers replaced Thirteenth South Street and State Street (the city's central north-south roadway), when city officials redirected water from the flooding Jordan River and City Creek (Sillitoe).

West of the city, the rising waters most dramatically affected the Great Salt Lake. With an average depth of less than 15 feet, extremely flat banks, and no outlet, any additional water dramatically influences the lake's total surface area (Mathews). Depth fluctuations measured in feet result in surface area changes measured in hundreds if not thousands of square miles. Calculated in feet above sea level, between September 1982 and June 1983 the lake rose from 4199.4 feet to 4204.05 feet, the largest seasonal gain on record, and reclaimed land containing railroads, farms, and Interstate 80, one of the most significant transcontinental roadways in the United States (Williams 8).

These events can and were interpreted in multiple fashions. In a *Washington Post* article, Jay Matthews writes about the lake as an unstoppable invasion into sites of human civilization, concluding that its expansion "undermined" surrounding roads and farms (A2). James Starbuck, in a 2012 encyclopedia article, translates mudslides and swollen rivers as "threats" to towns and commerce, while the colluding weather circumstances represent a "disaster" and a "worst-case scenario" to Starbuck. Local writer and historian, Linda Sillitoe, draws on similar imagery when she describes the "ruckus" caused by a flooding City Creek.

Such interpretations accurately portray these events. The flooding waters tragically displaced families, destroyed homes and businesses, and resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars in repair costs. Without minimizing these disastrous circumstances, I suggest that the events of 1983 also signify a rewilding. In terms of psychological response, the rivers running through city streets and the ever-rising water level of the Great Salt Lake turned human awareness and attention back to elements of nature. Thoughts and human action throughout the Salt Lake Valley were rewilded, or as Williams writes, “during these years [1982-1983], talk on the streets of Salt Lake City has centered around the lake. . . . it is no longer just a backdrop for spectacular sunsets. It is the play of urban drama (8). With the floods, the wild recontextualized city and human life, as water (re)defined Salt Lake City and its surrounds in 1982 and 1983.

In terms of physical conditions, the expanding lake signifies a return to previous circumstances, a reinstatement of a former body of water known as Lake Bonneville. Occurring during the Pleistocene epoch, at its largest, Lake Bonneville covered more than 32,000 square miles (an area about the size of present-day South Carolina) throughout northwest Utah and southern Idaho (geology.isu.edu). Its greatest depth measured more than 1000 feet, and the many islands it once contained are now mountain ranges throughout western Utah (Gwynn). Approximately 16,000 years ago, Lake Bonneville breached the Red Rock Pass in southern Idaho and began eroding the rock throughout the pass (geology.isu.edu). The breakdown resulted in an immense flood and shrinkage of the lake, which eventually declined in size and water level to its current state, now known as the Great Salt Lake (geology.isu.edu).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> For Williams’s account of these events, see pages 30-32 in *Refuge*.

In flowing out again toward these ancient shorelines, the expanding perimeter of the Great Salt Lake appeared to be returning to a previous state. Hemmed in by roads, rail lines, and other boundaries, the Great Salt Lake pushed beyond these bounds back toward a condition defined more by nature than by humanity. As the flooding of the Jordan and Clay Rivers reintroduced a sense of wild nature to Thirteenth and State Street, the enlarging lake extended a rewilded sense into the land around it. Recording these events, Williams writes, “I turn around three hundred and sixty degrees: water as far as I can see. The echo of Lake Bonneville lapping against the mountains returns,” and when the lake rises another foot, she likewise observes, “The water level of Great Salt Lake is so high now that it recalls the memory and reality of Lake Bonneville. The Wasatch Mountains capped with snow seem to rise from a sparkling blue sea” (97, 140). Water and mountains, two aspects that had once defined the Pleistocene Lake Bonneville had once again become the primary characteristics of this locale.

Williams interprets and responds to this rewilding in complex and perhaps contradictory ways. Similar to her observations of the returning Lake Bonneville, Williams subtly indicates celebration at the sight of the Great Salt Lake’s rising waters. Writing about the largest island in the lake, Antelope Island, Williams notes, “A state park claims the northern tip with a few facilities for tourists, but with the causeway submerged, it becomes wild and uninterrupted country once again” (64). In contrasting the state park and tourist facilities with the undisturbed land, Williams places the description of the rewilded island last in the sentence, implying her preference for wild conditions on this island and indicating her welcome of their return.

In similar passages, Williams describes the effects of the rising waters on the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge. Initially the alkaline flats around the refuge, which are usually dry, take on moisture. Cattails begin to look like “snorkels” to Williams, with only a few inches of their flower heads showing above the new water line (40). Comparable to the submerged causeway to Antelope Island, rising waters cut off human access to the refuge and chip away at reminders of a human presence when they inundate the access road and damage the government office buildings (156-157). Noting these conditions, Williams writes, “Bear River now belongs to the birds” (157).

Williams’s tone in this concluding statement is less straightforward than that in the passage regarding Antelope Island. In one sense, the phrase “to the birds” echoes the idiom “for the birds” and implies an idea of abandonment. Read in this manner, Williams might be indicating that humanity has discarded the flooded refuge and left it for the birds. If read in tandem with the Antelope Island section, however, Williams’s sentiment for the return of a wild state marks both passages. In this interpretation, as with the island, Williams notes with eagerness the transition from roads and buildings to a locale defined solely by birds, and she celebrates that this place is once again “wild and uninterrupted” (64).

Similar to scenes from *All the Pretty Horses* and *Housekeeping*, a sense of loss and mourning underlies Williams’s interactions with these rewilded spaces. The bird refuge represents consistency to Williams, a place of comfort and familiarity. “The birds and I share a natural history. It is a matter of rootedness,” she writes (21). When the rising waters inundate nesting grounds and food supplies, forcing countless bird populations to find shelter and nutrients elsewhere, Williams feels “displaced” and longs

for everything to be “back to its original shape” (97, 68). She views the flooded refuge as inevitably lost, finds that she cannot adjust to the changing land and waterscape, and thinks of herself as “adrift with no anchor to hold [her] in place” (113, 140, 177).

The rewilding bird refuge translates as loss and mourning to Williams in part because she intertwines the Bird Refuge with her family (40). The rise of the Great Salt Lake represents and mirrors the rise of a tumor in Williams’s mother (22). The waters “surging along Antelope Island’s shores [are] the force wearing against [her] mother’s body,” for the island is her mother’s cancer-filled body (64). For Williams, connections to land mirror family relations, and the combination of the flooding bird refuge and her mother’s cancer threatens two elements she regards as “bedrock” (40). Witnessing a flooded bird refuge compounds her grief and sense of loss, for rather than provide a sense of escape, environment now shuttles Williams back into her family by mirroring the loss and destruction of her mother’s cancer.

### **Rewilding: Adaptation and the Wilderness Within**

Williams’s sense of loss also derives in part from shifting boundaries. Places and sites formerly accessible must now be viewed or experienced from a distance. When waters submerge the causeway to Antelope Island, Williams takes up a “remote vantage point” from which she can watch the island through binoculars, concluding that, “Antelope Island is no longer accessible to me” (64). In a similar experience, Williams attempts to drive west from Brigham City toward Bear River. Before the Great Salt Lake flooded, Williams could drive for fifteen miles on this trip, but now the lake’s waters force her to stop three miles outside the city. She drives until water begins leaking

through the floorboards, and stopping, she climbs out onto her car's roof, from where she observes birds (141). Although the drive into the lake echoes Williams's other attempts to intertwine with the sand and water around her, she must abandon these aims in this instance, remaining perched above the waters rather than slipping into them. As indicated by her position on the car, the flooding and rewilding of the Great Salt Lake not only displace and re-place Williams, but also reposition and resituate her with relation to wilderness.

Unable to access the Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge, Antelope Island, and other locations that Williams translates as wilderness and as sites for strength, escape, and consubstantial shifting, she seeks to discover new positions in regard to these places. Quoting a poem from Rainer Maria Rilke, Williams yearns "not to be cut off / not through the slightest partition" (272); therefore, rather than leaving these sites, Williams chooses to stay and find ways to be drawn further into the "essence" of these places (4). Gliding constitutes one new position. Watching gulls fly over the Great Basin on a day when her "soul has been wrenched," Williams finds that the "simplicity of flight and form above the lake untangles [her] grief"; when the birds write "glide" in the sky, for a "few brief moments," she follows their lead (75). Whereas Williams has previously sought to entwine and submerge herself into elements of sand and water, to be intimately present in and within wilderness, in this context she aims to establish distance between herself and wilderness. Where connection to land and waves granted her psychological refreshment and spiritual renewal before the rising of the Great Salt Lake, in this case she gains a similar experience by being removed. Comparable to the birds, in detaching, Williams is freed to "mediate between heaven and earth" (95).

Similar to gliding with birds across fluctuating wind streams, Williams identifies a second modified posture toward wilderness in her study of the Fremont, a desert people who inhabited the Great Basin approximately a thousand years ago (180). To live next to the Great Salt Lake, the “Fremont oscillated with the lake levels,” following the “expanding and receding shorelines” (183). They moved and “accommodated change” (183). Rather than insisting on fixed patterns of interaction with wilderness and feeling immobilized when those points of access shift, Williams witnesses a flexibility in the Fremont that recognizes wilderness as bearing multiple manifestations with numerous paths to access its environments and experiences.

Both positions indicate movement and adjustment, marking a shift in Williams’s relation to wilderness. Williams previously interacted with wilderness as if it were static. The Bird Refuge and the Great Salt Lake bore particular shapes to Williams, constant anchors without variance or significant change. Following the flooding of the Great Salt Lake and the modifications brought about by rewilding, rather than insisting on set boundary lines, Williams considers how “borders are fluid, not fixed” (239). In this context, like the birds at the refuge that are adjusting to rising waters Williams finds that adaptation is the basis of an interaction with wilderness, as she writes, “I am adapting as the world is adapting” (267).

Adaptation connotes adjustment, a becoming accustomed to new circumstances, but it also represents a resituating, a reassemblage of existing parts in a new manner or site. For Williams, this new location becomes the interior self. Displaced from the bird refuge and cut off from locales like Antelope Island, Williams adapts by turning inward,

by restructuring her wilderness experience in her self. Williams's extended quote of Rilke's poem reflects her adaptation and turn inward:

Ah, not to be cut off,  
not through the slightest partition  
shut out from the law of the stars.  
The inner – what is it?  
if not intensified sky,  
hurled through with birds and deep  
with the winds of homecoming. (272)

Similar to Rilke, who avoids being “shut out from the law of the stars” by looking inward to an “intensified sky / hurled through with birds and deep,” Williams contends that while wilderness exists about her, it also resides in her inner self. Drawing on Gnostic teachings, Williams writes, “For what is inside of you is what is outside of you. . . . And what you see outside of you, you see inside of you” (267). From Williams's new posture, to see wilderness externally is to see it internally; the wilderness of rocks and sand is also the wilderness of emotions and thoughts. For Williams, “every pilgrimage to the desert is a pilgrimage to the self” (148), and rather than searching for wilderness and refuge beyond her self, Williams now concludes, “Refuge is not a place outside myself” (267).

As Williams's position atop her car indicates a shift in her physical and psychological relations with wilderness, it also depicts challenges to her subjective action toward and appropriation of wilderness. The expanding Great Salt Lake waters contest her economic privileges of transportation, annulling her resources of time, money, and

movement. While the lake's rewilding prohibits her usual class-based routes to wilderness, it concurrently exceeds Williams's construct of such places; her desires and needs no longer resonate with the rising Great Salt Lake. In this sense, Williams's perception of loss stems not only from physical removal from Antelope Island and the Bird Refuge or from an awareness of displacement but also from an inability to make wilderness her own, to shape it toward her own ends.<sup>57</sup> Borrowing from and modifying Saussure, rewilding loosens the links between the signifier and signified; the flooding waters reshape the signified to where Williams's signifiers no longer associate with wilderness. Unable to reach outward toward some other object, Williams's signifiers fold inward, directing attention to their source.

Put differently, rewilding contests links between physical places and psychological responses. As John Vucetich and Michael Nelson write, "Wilderness entails two distinct concepts," a "physical wilderness" and an "experiential wilderness" (611-612). While Williams previously shuttled between these concepts, seamlessly latching her expected experiences onto physical lands and easily absorbing external cues to prompt psychological responses, rewilding makes the physical site of wilderness unavailable, relegating Williams to a wilderness comprised primarily of emotional and mental experiences. As implied above, within this state, wilderness becomes reanimated and rewilded for Williams. While the wilderness Williams accessed before the flooding waters was known and experienced intimately, it resided within her subjective scripts and entitlements, but the wilderness that takes shape in 1983 shifts Williams into a posture of

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<sup>57</sup> Williams gestures toward a similar point when she writes, "maybe it is not the absence of the moon that frightens us, but the absence of what we expect to be there" (146). What Williams applies to the moon and its absence, I extend to her general interaction with wilderness. Loss in both cases connotes not only a missing physical property or element but also an unavailable context in which to experience expected interactions and emotions.

witnessing self-willed environments beyond her physical needs and psychological structures. In this posture, even as she challenges Cronon's and Feldman's narratives of beneficial rewildings, she also echoes their sense of a modifying wilderness, one that continuously expresses a returning wild.

### **Posturing in Sites of Rewilding**

Terry Tempest Williams's responses to the flooding of Bear River Migratory Bird Refuge and of the Great Salt Lake represent one range of reactions to rewilding places, and by extension, to similar scenarios in contemporary wilderness. Her narrative suggests a removed posture toward such places and conditions, implying a position of observing and walking softly through wilderness. Even as she witnesses significant changes and supposed challenges to her understanding of wilderness, Williams maintains a hands-off approach. In part, her response reflects a lack of a tangible adversary: "there is no one to blame, nothing to fight" (140), but her reaction also separates her from intervention, management, and other actions based on a perception that the rewilding conditions require fixing or reversal. Rather than extend her energies toward staying the fluctuating waters, Williams watches from a distance and concludes, "the only thing we can expect is change" (146). Writing ten years later, in an afterword of the tenth anniversary edition of *Refuge*, Williams maintains her position, stating, "The only truth I trust is change" (313).

Few in the Salt Lake Valley join Williams in her posture of a mournful but accommodating witness. Responding to pressure from railroad companies, the Salt Lake City International Airport, and mineral companies, the Utah State Legislature drafts five options to counter the Great Salt Lake's rising waters levels. They consider breaching the

Southern Pacific Railroad Causeway, damming the largest tributary of the lake (the Bear River), diverting the Bear River to flow into the Snake River, diking selective spots along the lake's shoreline, and pumping water into an evaporation pond in the West Desert (58-61). They initially decide to breach the causeway, but when water levels do not recede quickly enough the Utah Legislature approves funds to pump the water, creating the West Desert Pumping Project (130-131). When the project is completed, Governor Norm Bangerter claims, "We've harnessed the lake! We are finally in control" (247). In 1988 the American Society of Civil Engineers nominates the project for its Outstanding Civil Engineering Achievement Award, and pumps continue to run until "the flood is over" (257, 273). In contrast to Williams, who would prefer to minimize her interactions in order to attend to the "mind" of the lake, (139), Governor Bangerter and the Utah State Legislature favor intervention, scripting their actions as assistance to an inept and malfunctioning aspect of nature.

The contrast between Williams's response and that of Utah state government signifies a central tension in current wilderness debates: what role should humanity adopt in regard to an ever-changing wilderness?<sup>58</sup> As an echo of the West Desert Pumping Project, Christopher Solomon argues for one option in a recent New York Times article, contending that we should revisit the "guardians not gardeners" rhetoric of the 1964 Wilderness Act and "put our hands on America's wildest places" to ensure their survival

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<sup>58</sup> During the final stages of this project, Orion Magazine highlighted two authors who model this divide. Emma Marris, in her article "Handle with Care" argues that many contemporary wild areas require human assistance to cope with climate change. Citing the planting of whitebark pine seedlings that appear resistant to blister rust, Marris contends that only human intervention can prolong a sense of wild places. In June, with its 2015 book award, Orion also registered a position closer to Williams's than Governor Bangerter (and Marris) by selecting George Monbiot's *Feral: Rewilding the Land, the Sea, and Human Life*, in which he argues that nature should be allowed to "find its own way" (9). For Monbiot, humans should strive to let environments be "self-willed" and let "nature decide" its own course (10). As argued throughout, the works featured in this project gesture more toward Monbiot's position.

in an era of exigent environmental conditions. According to Solomon, digging irrigation ditches, transplanting threatened species, and altering declining landscapes can “make the landscape more resilient” and can “help nature adapt by giving it a hand in this strange new world” (1).

*Refuge* probes the question of human involvement within a context of wilderness areas that are pushing back toward previous, more wilded states, and the narrative is particularly interested in how humanity might respond when rewilding poses threats to human culture and concerns, when it begins to dismantle the works and creations of humanity. The “wait-and-see” response modeled by Williams echoes throughout the other works considered in this project and puts forth an alternate posture for those who contend that wilderness gardening inflicts more harm than good and who desire different narratives than those of Christopher Solomon and Governor Bangerter. A shift in narratives results in a shift in attitudes and postures, so argue the imaginative works attended to here. Rather than arrive in wilderness stylized as conquerors, the figures of John Grady, Ruth, and Terry Tempest Williams position humanity in roles of lament and offer to join their voices with those observing and mourning a troubled wilderness.

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