

HAUNTED BY WATERS:
THE HYDROPOLITICS OF AMERICAN LITERATURE AND FILM,
1960-1980

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ABSTRACT

ZACKARY VERNON: *Haunted by Waters: The Hydropolitics of American Literature and Film, 1960-1980*
(Under the direction of Fred Hobson)

Roman Polanski's 1974 film *Chinatown* characterizes the chief engineer of L.A.'s Department of Water and Power as having "water on the brain." During the 1960s and 1970s numerous Americans shared a similar preoccupation with water as they were inundated with everything from floods to droughts, rivers dammed to rivers on fire, oceanic radiation to lunar seas. Such events quickly became a cultural obsession that coincided with an era of water-related political debates about the preservation of the nation's aquatic ecosystems. I contend that these hydropolitical concerns had far-ranging implications; in an era when unease over damming and industrial contamination converged with a larger Cold War culture of containment and conformity, many postwar Americans were attracted to and identified with neo-romantic images of "wild," "natural" water. However, the irreconcilable gap between these images and the unprecedented water crises of the period gave rise to crises of the self. Such existential fears were amplified as nuclear societies confronted the all-too-real prospect of an end of nature and the corresponding end of humanity. Out of this milieu emerged a subgenre of American environmental literature and film that was both a manifestation and an index of posthuman apprehension. Consisting of canonical and non-canonical figures in the environmentalist tradition—including Pare Lorentz, Rachel Carson, Kurt Vonnegut, Elia Kazan, Robert Penn

Warren, John Cheever, James Dickey, Roman Polanski, Edward Abbey, and Leslie Marmon Silko—this subgenre deploys hydrocentric metaphors of fluidity, containment, and contagion as a way to discuss broader Cold War concerns over the status of American culture, nature, and the increasingly indistinct boundaries between the two. In addition to literary texts and films, this project draws on a wide variety of materials—including legal documents and governmental propaganda—that previously have fallen outside the purview of ecocritical scholarship. Considered in conversation, these hydrocentric texts illustrate a historical trajectory from the birth of postwar American environmentalism to the apogee of radical ecological philosophy and activism.

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INTRODUCTION

American Hydropolitics

“The guy’s got water on the brain.”

- Robert Towne and Roman Polanski, *Chinatown* (1974)

“Eventually, all things merge into one, and a river runs through it. The river was cut by the world’s great flood and runs over rocks from the basement of time. On some of the rocks are timeless raindrops. Under the rocks are the words, and some of the words are theirs.

I am haunted by waters.”

- Norman Maclean, *A River Runs through It* (1976)

Dissertation Overview

On the day of the 1981 Spring Equinox, members of the newly-formed radical environmental group Earth First! arrived at the Glen Canyon Dam. In order to demonstrate their opposition to the damming of the Colorado River, Earth First! planned to unroll a three-hundred-foot plastic banner down the surface of the dam that would look eerily like a large crack. As the

“crack” unfurled down the surface of the dam, and as police and park rangers moved in on the protesters, the group’s “guru,” environmental writer Edward Abbey, addressed the enthusiastic crowd: “Earth first. How can we create a civilization fit for the dignity of free men and women if the globe itself is ravaged, polluted, defiled, and insulted?” (qtd. in Philippon, “Edward Abbey’s Remarks” 165). Abbey’s comments resonate with my dissertation’s broader investigation of the profound connection between American identity and perceptions of “wild” nature.

In order to demonstrate how the “cracking” of the Glen Canyon Dam is representative of larger cultural phenomena of the period, I examine literary texts and films in conjunction with hydropolitics—the intense water-related political debates of the 1960s and 1970s. Each chapter of my dissertation focuses on a hydrological metaphor of fluidity, containment, or contagion used by postwar writers and filmmakers to explore Cold War anxieties related to gender, sexuality, (post)humanism, and cultural heterogeneity.¹ Such tropes transfigure historic ecological events—such as widespread aquatic contamination from DDT or massive Tennessee Valley Authority flood projects—and my research reveals the extent to which individual and national identities were influenced by the ontological and epistemological connections among nature, culture, and subjectivity.

While the connections between human communities and water are cultural, they are also necessarily biological, as we rely physiologically on clean, potable water. Moreover, our concern for water purity is often psychological and ontological, as we are drawn to water because we are

¹ Daniel J. Philippon argues, “Metaphors enact this cultural work because they enable narratives that in turn convey our *values*. In an environmental context, we might say that our environmental values are embodied in the metaphors we use to represent ‘nature,’ because these metaphors imply particular stories about how we relate to the ‘nature’ they describe. Furthermore, because these metaphors and their accompanying narratives are socially constructed, they serve as the agents of social change (or social maintenance, as the case may be)” (*Conserving Words* 5-6). Furthermore, Victoria Strang contends that water is a particularly powerful metaphor across cultures and histories because it can signify so many different ideas: “Its characteristics of transmutability and fluidity make it the perfect analogue for describing complex ideas about change, transformation, mood and movement... Of all the elements in the environment, it is the most suited to convey meaning in every aspect of life” (61).

quite literally made up of it.² In a recent issue of *PMLA* devoted to Oceanic Studies (2010), Patricia Yaeger asks,

How liquid are we? While human bodies seem substantial and geocentric and while many creation myths insist that our fundament is clay or earth, we are mostly made out of water: not geo- but aquacentric. Science explains that we emerged from the sea—our blood a tide of oceanic ions. The chemical formula for blood is very like the formula for seawater. Since cells evolved in oceans, when animals clambered out of the sea evolutionary processes took the simplest route—ensuring that the material outside cell walls resembled this early creaturely environment. (524-5)

Because the elemental composition of the body mirrors that of the ocean, cultural anthropologist Veronica Strang argues that water is *the* essential substance for all life, including human life, and thus the importance of water, both physiologically and culturally, has been a prominent commonality among civilizations throughout history. Strang also notes that water evinces the interconnections between the human and natural worlds: “The meanings encoded in [water] are not imposed from a distance, but emerge from an intimate interaction involving ingestion and expulsion, contact and immersion. Engagement with water is the perfect example of a recursive relationship in which nature and culture literally flow into each other” (5). The disruption of seemingly natural waters—either through containment or contamination—causes widespread anxiety because water so often enables us to conceptualize and understand the physical composition of the body, the formation of the self, and the relationship between culture and the environment.

² The human body consists of approximately 67% water (Strang 62).

Due to this bio-physiological connection and the hydro-politics of the era, postwar Americans not only had “water on the brain,” as the film *Chinatown* (1974) indicates, but they were also “haunted by waters,” as Norman Maclean suggests in *A River Runs Through It* (1976). For many Americans, the irreconcilable conflict between the reality of midcentury ecological crises and the neo-romantic desire to experience the natural world in its wildest and purest state was haunting. Water issues had particularly profound cultural resonance during this period, as the degradation of aquatic ecosystems had the most far-ranging ramifications of any environmental threat. Moreover, the water-related ecological crises of the period often gave rise to crises of the self because threats to water were also threats to survival and well-being. These existential anxieties increased throughout the Cold War period due to the development of nuclear and biochemical technologies that had the potential to alter life on earth so drastically as to destabilize categories of the human and nature. This cultural milieu produced an outpouring of posthuman apprehension, and disruptions of water, more than any other element in the environment, haunted the American psyche and engendered a distinct subgenre of environmental literature and film.³

Studying the dynamic relationship between the water-haunted culture and art of the postwar period opens new critical avenues that enable this project to place American literary and film studies in dialogue with the broader interdisciplinary field of environmental studies. In neglecting to consider 1960s and 1970s literature and film in relation to the hydro-politics of the period, scholars have overlooked a key thematic preoccupation of postwar culture as well as a heretofore unacknowledged subgenre. To fill this lacuna, I draw from canonical and non-canonical literature as well as environmental research from a variety of fields and disciplines in

³ While posthumanism is often understood in relation to how advances in technology destabilize the categorization of the human, I employ a broader conception of posthumanism that challenges notions of the human by juxtaposing it with the nonhuman world, including animals and the environment. See Clark 63-66.

order to investigate the cross-pollination between artistic production and environmental philosophy, policy, and activism. I do not reductively suggest that the rise of mid-century environmentalism and the legislative changes that it motivated served as originary inspirations for the literature and film under consideration; likewise, I do not seek to prove that environmentally engaged literature led to the environmental movement. Rather I argue that both of these trends occurred simultaneously, and that both trends impacted American identity formation during the 1960s and 1970s.

In moving beyond a mere inventory of the ways in which artistic productions grapple with actual ecological or geographical issues, I employ a threefold approach to hydropolitics: considering how ecological contexts shaped the content and form of literary and cinematic texts, how these texts influenced environmental philosophy and major legislation, and how the interactions between artistic, philosophical, and legal movements shaped American conceptions of environmental stewardship. Furthermore, this project explores how writers' and filmmakers' aesthetic choices and thematic preoccupations work both against and in tandem with the nation's ideological concerns regarding the environment. Some texts display anxiety over containment strategies, resisting all human interference, for example, with wild rivers; others advocate for fair and just control over the nation's water resources. Still others fueled the development of radical environmental philosophies. By mobilizing the post-apocalyptic imagery of Cold War military conflicts, some artists advocated for the destruction of human technologies, such as dams, and indicted postwar prosperity and expansion as the real source of contamination.⁴

⁴ Throughout much of human history, one of the most significant ways in which humans have altered the natural world is by manipulating its hydrologies through the development of dams, levees, and aqueducts. According to the World Commission on Dams (WCD)—a group comprised of 68 independent researchers from 36 countries and representing a cross-section of interdisciplinary interests—the flow of nearly half of the planet's rivers is now altered by large dams. If one considers smaller dams, then the figures are considerably higher, leaving only a small fraction of the world's rivers that still flow naturally. Proponents of large dams often point to social, environmental,

My dissertation begins with an unlikely pairing—Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962) and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle* (1963). Both authors, however, align Cold War nuclear anxieties with growing fears over ecological crises in order to elevate environmental threats to the level of militaristic ones. Conveying an early conception of “deep ecology,” Carson and Vonnegut deploy water-borne contagions that threaten to destroy the earth’s biosphere in order to challenge the arbitrary boundaries between nations, as well as between humans and the environment, in an age of growing global pollution. Thus, for Carson and Vonnegut, manipulated hydrologies quickly exceed their categorization as merely environmental issues and become political, cultural, and ontological concerns as well.

While many postwar Americans feared threats of Communism from abroad, writers and filmmakers also grappled with Cold War-inflected perceptions of domestic governmentality. My second chapter examines literary and cinematic representations of the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA). The TVA was a New Deal project that dammed rivers and created hydroelectric plants in the American South, a region that Franklin Delano Roosevelt called the nation’s largest economic problem. While the TVA succeeded in its aims to provide flood control and hydroelectric power to the South, it also displaced more than 125,000 people, most of whom were farmers (Klingensmith 37-9). Thus, the federal government, using laws of eminent domain, disrupted an agrarian culture to facilitate the industrialization of the region. Many films and novels of the 1960s and 1970s—for instance, Elia Kazan’s film *Wild River* (1960) and Robert Penn Warren’s novel *Flood* (1963)—explore how such alterations to the

and economic needs that dams and reservoirs help facilitate, such as agricultural irrigation, flood control, riverine navigation, healthy water supplies, and electricity. Although large dam projects have succeeded in addressing some water management concerns, they have also exacerbated numerous environmental issues, such as the loss of native ecosystems and the reduction of biodiversity (15). The creation of dams and reservoirs has also displaced more than 80 million people from riverine communities across the globe, and it has caused vast cultural homogenization.

environment engender cultural changes. These works evoke the TVA as a metaphor for the homogenization of regional communities and, more broadly, the flattening of perceived exceptionalism in the cultures of the American South.

Like Kazan and Warren, John Cheever and James Dickey share anxieties about cultural homogenization and environmental degradation. However, rather than being preoccupied principally with southern identity, Cheever and Dickey use the metaphor of contained waters to link postwar suburban malaise to a culture that represses both human and nonhuman communities. The backyard swimming pools in Cheever's 1964 short story "The Swimmer" and the man-made lakes in Dickey's 1970 novel *Deliverance*—along with the film adaptations of each text—represent domesticated versions of the natural world that critique the pervasive logic of cultural and sexual normativity. I argue that Cheever and Dickey juxtapose images of contained water with images of wild, free-flowing rivers in order to imagine an existence beyond repression. Furthermore, I contend that Dickey crafted *Deliverance*, at least in part, as a response to "The Swimmer," and my comparative study reveals new ecocritical and queer interpretations of each text. Central to my argument about the use of water in these narratives is the fact that both Cheever and Dickey struggled throughout their lives to understand their own same-sex desires, and both used water imagery as a vehicle for understanding their sexual orientations.

My fourth and concluding chapter analyzes Edward Abbey's derisive evaluation of humanity's desire to modify and, in many cases, destroy the nation's rivers and waterscapes. Although Abbey's advocacy of environmentally minded anarchism and ecosabotage was at times counterproductive for the environmental movement, his work provides a fitting theoretical and historical conclusion to my dissertation. Abbey's platform suggests an alternative to American capitalist ideology—which he characterizes as "Growth for the sake of growth" (*The Monkey*

Wrench Gang 126)—and he argues that this ideology must be dismantled because it threatens individual and national identities that are dependent on natural, non-commodified spaces.

Furthermore, Abbey's work marks a turning point in American environmental writing in that he promotes vandalism and even violence as ways to defend his beloved rivers in the American West.

The radicalism that Abbey advocates has been maintained in more recent fringe environmental groups, such as Earth First!, Greenpeace, and Earth Liberation Front. In a coda to my dissertation, I argue that considering the hydropolitics of 1960s and 1970s American literature and film enables us to better understand contemporary global concerns over resource crises and the accompanying neo-imperial drive to expand territorial holdings by invasion and environmental destruction. By analyzing contemporary works, particularly Leslie Marmon Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), I argue that Americans continue to be drawn to hydrologies that remain largely unaltered by humans. Moreover, these recent texts perpetuate the work begun in the postwar period by asserting that the degradation of the environment detracts from humans' potential to experience an elemental connection with a nonhuman other. As hydrological concerns become ever more severe—ranging from the Three Gorges Dam in China to the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico, and from the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan to global floods induced by climate change—protest tactics are becoming more severe as well. Disturbingly, the F.B.I. has named “ecoterrorism” the U.S.'s leading post-9/11 domestic terrorist threat. Studying the hydropolitics of the postwar period not only reveals an underexplored historical preoccupation of American literature, film, and culture, but also proves increasingly relevant as we move into a period in which climate change and industrial waste are causing massive flooding and water-borne contamination in countries across the globe. These unprecedented

ecological changes will result in pressing cultural, political, and ontological questions to which postwar hydropolitical literature and cinema will undoubtedly speak.⁵

Theoretical Frameworks and Methodologies

Throughout this dissertation, I examine the ways in which postwar Americans attempt to address water-related ecological crises as well as the ways in which postwar American artists imagine such crises and, in the process, render water into important signifiers, symbols, and tropes. The most fitting theoretical framework to examine these issues is the relatively new but burgeoning field of ecocriticism. At its most basic level, ecocriticism explores the relationship—viewed generally as symbiotic rather than anthropocentric or humanocentric—between literature, culture, and the physical world. In “Literary Studies in the Age of Environmental Crisis,” Cheryll Glotfelty states that ecocriticism enables scholars to examine “the reciprocal relationships between human and land, considering nature not just as a stage upon which the human story is acted out, but as an actor in the drama” (xxi). Given the consistent emphasis on land and place in American literature, ecocriticism proves to be an invaluable tool in analyzing texts that deal with the connections not only among individual subjects and culture but also subjects and the environment, and culture and the entire biosphere. Additionally, ecocriticism possesses a distinct and inherent social utility. Pioneering works of ecocriticism, including Donald Worster’s *The Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (1993) and Lawrence Buell’s *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), demonstrate that ecocentric approaches to literature are

⁵ This project is by no means comprehensive in its analysis of American hydropolitical literature and history. By necessity, I omit many interesting texts and histories; however, I attempt to explore a representative sampling of these significant texts and histories. At the end of this dissertation, following the Works Cited, I provide a lengthy list of hydrocentric texts and films, many of which deserve further critical attention.

particularly salient in contemporary society because the world now faces a myriad of potential ecological catastrophes. Glotfelty echoes this point, as she argues that literary scholarship must not ignore “the most pressing contemporary issue of all, namely, the global environmental crisis” (xv). In other words, the responsibility falls on the shoulders of literary critics, as well as policy makers, to study the relationship between cultures and ecosystems in order to discern ways in which environmental awareness can lead to reform.

Lacking an environmental awareness and consequently lacking a sense of ecological empathy can result in environmental colonialism. In “The Agrarian Standard,” Wendell Berry asserts that “Industrialism prescribes an economy that is placeless and displacing,” and that an economy of colonialism gathers “exploitive economic power into the hands of a few people who are alien to the places and the people they exploit” (24-5). While Berry discusses colonialism primarily in terms of humans’ exploitation of the natural world to facilitate a rapacious industrial economy, his theorization draws upon traditional conceptions of how colonialism operates in the natural spaces it claims and occupies. For instance, Edward W. Said argues that literature of anti-imperial resistance derives from a desire to distance subjugator from subjugated; and it is crucial to note how intimately this effort is linked to the environment:

...there is a pressing need for the recovery of the land that, because of the presence of the colonizing outsider, is recoverable at first only through the imagination. Now if there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism it is the primacy of the geographical in it. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of his or her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of

the local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored. (77)

Building on Neil Smith's *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital and the Production of Space* (1984), Said suggests that one can think of the environment as being divided into three categories: first, second, and third nature. First nature is the world in its most pristine state, undisturbed by human involvement. Second nature refers to the natural world that has been altered by humans to meet our needs and desires; controlling rivers through the use of dams and the practice of agriculture are two prominent examples of second nature. Third nature refers to the natural world aestheticized; cultural productions, artistic renderings of the natural world, and the creation of gardens that include non-edible and non-utilitarian biodiversity are all examples of third nature. Said notes, "To the imagination of anti-imperialism, *our* space at home in the peripheries has been usurped and put to use by outsiders for *their* purposes. It is therefore necessary to seek out, to map, to invent, or to discover, a *third* nature, which is not pristine or prehistorical ... but one that derives historically and abductively from the deprivations of the present" (79). Said's use of these categories has been problematized by more recent environmental theorists; as I will discuss in detail, many scholars now maintain that first nature no longer exists, and instead that all facets of the biosphere have been shaped by human-induced ecological alterations such as climate change and ocean acidification. However, I find Said's categories useful as a way to order the built versus nonbuilt environment, even if the boundaries between the two are much more fluid than either Smith or Said would have recognized when they were working on such issues three decades ago.

Furthermore, Said's work heralds the recent "greening" of postcolonial studies (Clark 74), and this type of postcolonial theory will play an important role in my project in several

ways. First, I will consider the industrial and imperial motivations that often prompted the federal government (in the form of agencies such as the Tennessee Valley Authority) or private corporations (such as Duke Power) to alter irrevocably and in effect “colonize” through technocratic means less powerful regions and communities in the U.S. This type of analysis will be particularly relevant when discussing southern texts, especially if we acknowledge the partial “postcolonial status” of the American South, as Jon Smith and Deborah Cohn do in the introduction to their collection *Look Away! The U.S. South in New World Studies* (2004) (6). This consideration of postcoloniality will also be particularly relevant for my coda, in which I begin to explore the current hydropolitics of developing and/or decolonizing nations such as China and India. In addition, through my examination of hydropolitics, I will explore environmental colonialism as described by Berry, as well as how that colonialism has been catalyzed by an industrial economy and how various philosophical paradigms have been mobilized in defense of the environment. Therefore, in the spirit of Said, I will analyze twentieth-century American literary texts and films as examples of third nature that at times critique and at other times support the colonial transformations of first nature into second.

This project focuses on specific examples of third nature that engage with the environment in substantial ways. In determining which works to analyze, I have consulted the checklist created by Lawrence Buell to determine whether a work can be labeled “environmentally oriented”:

1. “The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history.”
2. “The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest.”
3. “Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation.”

4. “Some sense of the environment as a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text.” (*The Environmental* 7-8)

Taken together, the facets of this checklist function to define “environmentally oriented works” of literature as being principally interested in the reciprocal relationship between nature and culture in a specific place. Thus, ecocriticism, like most forms of contemporary criticism, takes a contextual approach in examining a particular work. While most literary critics pursue various cultural contexts, Timothy Clark argues that it is important to remember that “culture itself has a context—the biosphere, air, water, plant and animal life—and more radical ecocritical work tends to be, so to speak, *meta-contextual*, opening on issues that may involve perspectives or questions for which given cultural conceptions seem limited” (4). As we explore these contextual relationships, it is imperative to describe what exactly we mean when we discuss such concepts as “nature” and “culture.”

Raymond Williams has stated that “nature” is the “most complex word in the [English] language” (qtd. in Clark 6). The difficulty of defining “nature” results from the fact that its uses and meanings have altered radically over time. In his article “The Idea of Nature in America” (2008), Leo Marx suggests that “*nature* is our oldest, most nearly universal name for the material world”; however, he also notes that “the word nature is a notorious semantic and metaphysical trap” (9). Particularly in scholarship, but also in popular culture more broadly, the term “nature” has largely been replaced by “environment” because “nature” now seems outdated and inaccurate. Bill McKibben’s *The End of Nature* (2003) is one of the most famous and often cited examples of this line of thinking.⁶ McKibben contends that “nature” no longer exists because

⁶ In *Ecology without Nature* (2007), Timothy Morton also suggests that the term “nature” is no longer viable: “In discussing what sort of relationship people should have to their environments, why not drop the term ‘nature’ altogether, as a frequent source of confusion, obfuscation and moral dogmatism?” (qtd. in Clark 69).

human-induced ecological degradation, ranging from climate change to pervasive aquatic contamination, has impacted the biosphere to the extent that nature, as a wild and pristine space, is a thing of the past.⁷ According to Marx, the transition from using the term “nature” to using “environment” occurred squarely within the period explored in this dissertation: “Then, in the 1970s, with the onset of the ecological ‘crisis,’ the refurbished, matter-of-fact word *environment* took over a large part of the niche in public discourse hitherto occupied by the word *nature*” (“The Idea” 8). While “environment” can refer to the entire material world, “nature” has too often been “conceived as a separate entity [that] served as an all-purpose metaphysical Other” (Marx 17). “Environment” also contains “ideological neutrality and objectivity,” and it implies no distinction between the human and nonhuman, natural and artificial (Marx 17). Attentive to the impossibility of separating nature and culture, Donna Haraway argues that we should never use the word “nature” unqualified, and instead, she tends to use the compound term “natureculture” (qtd. in Clark 161).

Discounting the use of “nature” or eliding it with culture are both hallmarks of postmodern thinking, which seeks to problematize seemingly verifiable material truths like the existence of “nature.” In *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Fredric Jameson argues that the death of nature was a necessary first step in the development of postmodernism: “Postmodernism is what you have when the modernization process is complete and nature is gone for good” (ix). According to Jameson’s logic, rather than a biological, physical, and identifiable space separate from humans, nature is entirely a construction of culture

⁷ The interdisciplinary field of environmental studies has recently adopted the term “Anthropocene” to describe our current geological epoch, which is marked by humans’ alterations to the planet. Although the starting point of the Anthropocene is debated, scholars concur that due to global industrialization since World War II, humans’ destruction of the environment has accelerated at an unprecedented rate. The idea of the Anthropocene will likely prove invaluable for the future of ecocriticism as we continue to consider humans’ place in and responsibilities to this post-natural world.

and, more specifically, a product of discourse. Leo Marx further explains Jameson's position, saying, "From his idealist perspective, the dominant American idea of nature—nature primarily conceived as a terrain or other biophysical actuality—is meaningless. In Jameson's view, that usage, with its implicit claim to unmediated knowledge of the material world, is epistemologically naïve" ("The Idea" 17-18). According to Jameson, this position is naïve because humans can never cultivate a fully reliable or verifiable relation to material reality. While humans can undoubtedly experience the world nonlinguistically—i.e. have a visceral and immediate connection to the world outside of our bodies—we inevitably process those experiences linguistically, always relying on discourse to explore the meaning of our myriad experiences with the physical world around us. Daniel J. Philippon reminds us that "our knowledge of nature is always partial and limited, [and thus] works of nature writing are not transparent windows onto the world but are always historically and culturally mediated" (*Conserving Words*14).

In the debate over the degree to which nature is culturally and linguistically constructed, I follow Philippon's line of argumentation, which acknowledges both the material *and* ideological functions of the natural world. He and other recent ecocritics maintain that humans are bound to both nature and culture: "humans are part and parcel of the material world while at the same time being members of particular cultures. This is not to say that human cultures can exist outside of their natural environments, but it is to say that humans never have and never will exist wholly in a 'state of nature.' To be human is to be as much an inhabitant of culture as an inhabitant of nature" (Philippon 13). Similarly, Anthony Wilson argues for the importance of this balanced approach to the culture/nature divide in ecocritical interpretations of literature: "ecocriticism does not posit the natural as utterly independent of the human but as coexisting with, rather than

wholly created by, ideology and imagination: thus, it works alongside, rather than in opposition to, cultural studies” (182). Therefore, ecocriticism creates a significant theoretical space to consider both the natural and cultural as well as the infinite range of connections between the two.

While much of the earth is now built, domesticated, and homogenized, there are undoubtedly environments that remain more preserved and thus more “natural” than others. Clark reminds us that the natural world is still powerful, so much so that it is often completely uncontrollable by humans: “Far from being the sacral spectacle of some wilderness preserve or the object of various human ‘constructions,’ this is nature acknowledged as an agent in its own right, capricious, awesome and easily capable of wiping humanity off the face of the earth” (203). Theorizations that deconstruct the idea of nature not only disregard the real dangers that the natural world still poses to human beings, but they can also be fundamentally irresponsible. Wilson usefully asserts that “If the natural no longer exists, is entirely a product of human imagination, then what stands in the way of practical ecological catastrophe, pollution, deforestation, and a host of other potential and current disasters? ... Theorizing nature out of existence, ecocritics argue, can only support the forces that threaten it physically” (181). McKibben is careful to make a similar distinction; while he provides extensive evidence to support the idea of the “end of nature,” he also desires to maintain the presence of the nonhuman world: “We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning”; therefore, “nature’s independence is its meaning, without it there is nothing but us” (qtd. in Marx, “The Idea” 19). McKibben, like many contemporary environmental theorists, seems to be anxious about the loss of the nonhuman because the relationship between the human and nonhuman is significant for identity formation. In other words, humans require a nonhuman other to serve as a

point of juxtaposition, enabling us to usefully conceive of what it means to be human. Buell contends that this is a significant and positive advancement in recent environmental thinking: “One of the dramatic developments in postromantic thinking about nature has been the decline and revival of the kinship between nonhuman and human. Its metaphysics withered in the last half of the nineteenth century; high modernism announced its death; modern ecologism has brought it back” (*The Environmental* 180).⁸ Each author and filmmaker examined in this dissertation could be considered an example of Buell’s “modern ecologism.” They all explore the ontological ramifications of a “kinship between nonhuman and human,” and yet they also question whether this kinship is possible during or after the Cold War period.

A Brief Cultural History of Hydropolitics

In placing American literary and film studies in dialogue with the broader interdisciplinary field of environmental studies, I have deliberately chosen to focus on the literature and cinema of the 1960s and 1970s because I believe this is a pivotal and yet

⁸ One criticism frequently leveled against both “nature writing” and ecocriticism is that it promotes a romantic conception of the natural world that unrealistically assumes that humans can exist in a state of harmony or oneness with the nonhuman world. However, in recent years, particularly since the environmental movement of the 1960s and 1970s, the desire for kinship between humans and the nonbuilt, nonhuman environment has gained important traction, in part due to environmental literature, film, and criticism.

Another critique that has been increasingly leveled against ecocriticism is that it does not do the work of the ecological sciences, or if it does, it does so amateurishly. This critique has been articulated most forcefully by Dana Philips in *The Truth of Ecology: Nature, Culture, and Literature in America* (2003). Philips states that “too much of what is called nature writing proves, on closer inspection, not to be writing about nature at all; it is, instead, writing about a response to nature” (210). In a rebuttal to Philips, Scott Slovic argues that Philips’s argument is “reasonable” but “misdirected”: “Ecocriticism and nature writing tend largely to explore human responses to the physical world, to nature. The literature itself and the scholarship that illuminates and explains the literature are concerned with how we understand our experience of the world, how we learn about things beyond ourselves, how we come to value these phenomena, and sometimes how we feel when we learn that our behavior has resulted in various forms of loss and degradation. It’s no great revelation to claim that ecocriticism and nature writing concern themselves with feelings, value, and the workings of the human mind. Is this not what literature does? Is this not the proper territory of the humanities?” (Slovic, “Visceral Faulkner” 118-9). I agree with Slovic that environmental literature and film can simultaneously tell us a great deal about nature and human nature, and this new knowledge can catalyze new ways of seeing, experiencing, and protecting the nonhuman world.

underexplored period in Americans' ever-changing conceptions of the natural world. Prior to delving fully into the literature and film of this particular period, I will first discuss how radically American conceptions of the environment have changed, particularly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. More specifically, I will explore how the cultural context of the post-World War II generation engendered a distinctly hydrocentric preoccupation among many Americans.

My research demonstrates that throughout U.S. history, Americans' self-definition has been linked to their interactions with the natural world. This idea goes back to the first European contact with the new world and even to Native American cosmologies. America was perceived to be a green, "virgin" land that was undomesticated and purportedly untainted in the way that much of Europe was believed to be.⁹ Thus, in early American psychology, there was often the perception that tainted landscapes engendered tainted cultures, while seemingly virgin landscapes suggested limitless possibilities.¹⁰ Following seminal works such as John Opie's *Nature's Nation* (1998),¹¹ Leo Marx argues that "For some three centuries, in fact, from the founding of Jamestown in 1607 to the closing of the Western frontier in 1890, the encounter of white settlers with what they perceived as wilderness—unaltered nature—was *the* defining American experience" ("The Idea" 8). Prior to the development of American Romanticism, as

⁹ Leo Marx reminds us that while we must be attentive not to support an unwarranted notion of American exceptionalism, "it would be foolish to deny that when Europeans first encountered American nature, it truly was, and to some extent still is, exceptional—perhaps not unique but, like Australia, a continent even less developed at the time of contact, surely exceptional. It was exceptional in its immensity, its spectacular beauty, its variety of habitats, its promise of wealth, its accessibility to settlers from overseas, and, above all, in the scarcity of its indigenous population" (9-10).

¹⁰ This idea of "virgin" landscapes has been problematized in feminist and ecofeminist criticism since the 1970s. For example, Annette Kolodny argues that "America's oldest and most cherished fantasy" may be the idea of "harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification—enclosing the individual in an environment of receptivity, repose, and painless and integral satisfaction" (171).

¹¹ This phrase was first coined by Perry Miller in a 1953 essay (Marx, "The Idea" 9).

the country expanded westward, Americans adopted two contradictory views of the natural world: the majority thought it was “a hostile wilderness, a state of nature tolerable only insofar as it could be subjected to human domination”; however, a minority, particularly after the rise of European Romanticism, viewed it as “the embodiment of ultimate meaning and value” (Marx, “The Idea” 15).¹² Buell asserts that “Nature has long been reckoned a crucial ingredient of the American national ego,” and he notes that since its earliest iterations, “American literature has been considered preoccupied with country and wilderness as setting, theme, and value in contradistinction to society and the urban, notwithstanding the sociological facts of urbanization and industrialization” (*The Environmental* 33). In *Wilderness and the American Mind* (1967), Roderick Nash argues that conceptions of American nationalism were often based on nature, as Americans promoted the exceptionalism of the continent’s natural world in order to assuage feelings of cultural inferiority in relation to Europe.¹³

In their introduction to *In the Nature of Things: Language, Politics, and the Environment* (1993), Jane Bennett and William Chaloupka argue that Americans’ relationship to the natural world has always been significant to identity formation: “‘nature’ has performed an identity function allied to an ontological one. Nature is the other against which the human is defined, the raw to the culturally cooked. But nature is also the original, the given versus the made, and as such it provides the comfort of an existential foundation” (ix). The notion that the nonhuman

¹² Additionally, Americans often had a bifurcated religious view of the natural world—with some seeing it as an embodiment of Satan’s realm on earth, and others seeing it as a new, almost Edenic space. Marx argues that it was Thomas Jefferson who brought these conflicting ideas together: “Nature, as our free-thinking president conceived of it, was not so much the work of God as God was a constituent feature of Nature. By invoking a secularized idea of nature on behalf of a quintessentially political cause, Jefferson helped to narrow the gulf separating humanity and nature” (11). As the American Transcendentalists increasingly appropriated British Romanticism in the 1820s and 1830s, they sought to combat the Christian notion that it was heretical to feel a sense of oneness with nature. Emerson, particularly in his 1836 essay “Nature,” lamented humanity’s lack of an ontological connection with the natural world.

¹³ For an excellent, albeit dated, literature review of works dealing with nature and the frontier in early American psychology, see the “Ex Libris” section of John Seelye’s *Prophetic Waters: The River in Early American Life and Literature* (1977).

world has such vast ontological ramifications can run the risk of romanticizing humans' relationship with the natural world. Moreover, as I have previously discussed, it can be difficult, if not impossible, to identify the natural world, as the boundaries between built and nonbuilt environments become increasingly indistinct. In *Seeking Awareness in American Nature Writing*, Scott Slovic directly addresses this issue. Slovic critiques the "facile sense of harmony" that is all-too-often associated with "rhapsodic nature writer," claiming that this fantasy of connectedness with the natural world fails to result in a deeper sense of self-awareness (4). Instead, Slovic argues that humans do not "become one" with nature, but rather the nonhuman world creates awareness of the self and non-self: "It is only by testing the boundaries of self against an outside medium (such as nature) that many nature writers manage to realize who they are and what's what in the world" (4).

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, the connection between the natural world and American identity formation was increasingly troubled as the natural world began to look less and less natural due to exploitative industries, including coal, timber, oil, and agriculture. Marx argues that since colonization "the nation's chief geopolitical project" has been "the settlement and economic development of the continental landmass" (14). This domestication and, worse, destruction of the natural world reached a crisis point in the 1960s and 1970s. Not coincidentally, it was during this period of crisis that the modern environmental movement emerged:

The year 1970 is when the ecological 'crisis' caught up with the idea of nature. Public anxiety about the devastation of the natural world had grown steadily in the aftermath of Hiroshima and the on-set of the nuclear arms race. But it was not until 1970, the year of the first Earth Day, that the threat to the human habitat

attracted nationwide attention. And it was in 1970 that the emerging environmental movement first displayed its political power. (Marx 16)¹⁴

The anxiety over ecological crises catalyzed unprecedented mid-century legislative changes, at the heart of which were often concerns over water. For example, lawmakers developed the Federal Water Pollution Control Act of 1948, the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Water Quality Act of 1965, the Wild and Scenic River Act of 1968, the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, the Federal Water Pollution Control Amendments of 1972, the Toxic Substances Control Act of 1976, and the Clean Water Act of 1977.

Other than efforts to control water pollution, the most prominent hydropolitical battle during the postwar period erupted because of the creation of many large-scale dams, particularly throughout the American South and West. The United States currently contains approximately 6,500 large dams, 14% of the dams in the world (World Commission on Dams 11). While large-scale dams are still being regularly built in developing countries,¹⁵ since the 1970s the building of dams has declined sharply in the United States, and at present “the rate of decommissioning is greater than the rate of construction of new large dams” (World Commission on Dams 10-11). This waning of dam development in the U.S. is partially the result of the fact that many of the nation’s best suited dam sites have already been utilized. In addition, increased environmental awareness during the 1960s and 1970s among the American people helped to catalyze the legislation that now protects much of the nation’s waters from both unnecessary impoundment and ecological degradation. One significant example of this legislation, The Wild and Scenic

¹⁴ In addition, Richard Nixon’s 1970 State of the Union Address was one of the first significant instances of an American president directly addressing modern environmental concerns.

¹⁵ For instance, the World Commission on Dams notes that China continues to build dams despite already having 22,000, which is 46% of the dams in the world.

River Act of 1968, ensured that certain rivers in America would be protected in order to retain their natural hydrologies. The Act states:

It is hereby declared to be the policy of the United States that certain selected rivers of the Nation which, with their immediate environments, possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values, shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Congress declares that the established national policy of dams and other construction at appropriate sections of the rivers of the United States needs to be complemented by a policy that would preserve other selected rivers or sections thereof in their free-flowing condition to protect the water quality of such rivers and to fulfill other vital national conservation purposes.¹⁶

This Act was not created to condemn large-scale dam-building operations, but rather to strike a balance between necessary dams and the preservation of free-flowing rivers. The Clean Water Act of 1977 was also highly effective in achieving its goal of “restor[ing] and maintain[ing] the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters,”¹⁷ because it codified, more than any previous legislation, strict standards that ameliorated pollution from industrial, municipal, and agricultural facilities.

Explaining why so much environmental legislation was passed during the 1960s and 1970s, prominent political scientist Ronald Inglehart posits that economic security facilitates

¹⁶ Quoted on the official website of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: rivers.org.

¹⁷ <http://epw.senate.gov/water.pdf>.

ecological empathy and thus, during the postwar era, the Age of Affluence directly catalyzed the Age of the Environment.¹⁸ While the literature of this period reflects the notion that leisure often enabled certain environmental sensitivities, it also consistently demonstrates that leisure engendered malaise. Many late modern and early postmodern works link the rise of malaise with the increased standardization and homogenization of American culture *and* American ecosystems. Furthermore, these cultural productions establish a discernible link between the standardization and homogenization of culture and the standardization and homogenization of the environment. In other words, the flattening of environmental variables leads to the flattening of cultural variables and vice versa. Frederick R. Karl argues that the 1960s are marked by what he calls a “persistent pastoralism”: “Behind the malaise is that broken association of self and nature ... that loss the individual suffers when he recalls a once-Edenic existence, the hostility he senses toward ideas that remain only fantasies. A good part of the problem is our paradoxical need for Edenic memories even as we recognize they are mythical, that is, no longer visible, even if irresistible” (211). To overcome this persistent pastoralism and to facilitate standardization and homogenization, the country’s political and economic institutions relied upon a logic of domination and a culture of repression. In *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964), Leo Marx posits that “today’s advanced society may be singularly repressive. Can it be that our institutions and cultural standards are enforcing an increasingly painful, almost unbearable degree of privation of instinct?” (9).

In *Containment Culture: American Narrative, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (1995), Alan Nadel argues convincingly that postwar America was marked by a general culture of repression: “The proliferation of that normality—its stories and accoutrement, its mandates

¹⁸ Inglehart explains this principle at length in “Globalization and Postmodern Values” (2000) and “Changing Values among Western Publics from 1970 to 2006” (2008).

and repressions—may have been, I now think, a pervasive symptom of the trauma caused by witnessing a Great Depression, a Second World War, an ascent to atomic power, and a fantasy-like economic boom in less than one generation” (xi).¹⁹ According to Nadel, the Cold War-era demand for social conformity was met with “general acceptance”: “The virtue of conformity—to some idea of religion, to ‘middle-class’ values, to distinct gender roles and rigid courtship rituals—became a form of public knowledge through the pervasive performances of and allusions to containment narratives” (4).²⁰ Another facet of containment culture that emerged during the mid twentieth century, which Nadel does not address, was the desire to contain the forces of the natural world—a desire motivated by Americans’ larger desire to seize control in a world which seemed increasingly beyond their grasp.

This sense of environmental containment culture arose in perceptions of the large-scale damming projects that became so pervasive in the U.S. during the early to mid twentieth century. In many ways, the contemporary global craze to dam wild rivers has its roots in the American South, because the TVA launched one of the first and most successful campaigns in history to harness the flow of a vast network of rivers. The TVA’s efforts began in the early twentieth century, as perennial floods devastated the people and the landscapes of the American South. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter II, Franklin Roosevelt’s administration sought to address these flood-related issues by creating the TVA to dam rivers across the region. Ultimately, the

¹⁹ Nadel further explains, “Although technically referring to U.S. foreign policy from 1948 until at least the mid-1960s, it also describes American life in numerous venues and under sundry rubrics during that period: to the extent that corporate production and biological reproduction, military deployment and industrial technology, televised hearings and filmed teleplays, the cult of domesticity and the fetishizing of domestic security, the arms race and atoms for peace all contributed to the containment of communism, the disparate acts performed in the name of these practices jointed the legible agenda of American history as aspects of containment culture” (2-3).

²⁰ Additionally, Nadel contends that, above all other factors, the Cold War started and its unique qualities emerged from the U.S.’s development and then use of the atomic bomb; and thus “Very shortly after the bomb initially exploded upon American consciousness ... a national narrative developed to control the fear and responsibility endemic to possessing atomic power” (14).

TVA succeeded in providing flood control, riverine navigability, and abundant hydroelectric power for much of the South. However, such successes were often contested in the South because of the scheme's far-ranging impacts on southern environments and southern cultures. Perceptions of the TVA within the South varied wildly; for example, southern music during the 1930s and 40s registers a culture that both supported and vehemently opposed TVA projects. However, the national narrative during this period tended to depict the TVA as a savior, providing light, literally but also symbolically, to a South that many Americans still felt was backward and benighted.

Because many countries during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries turned to the creation of dams and reservoirs to help meet demands for water and increase national security and power, “dams became—in the eyes of many—synonymous with development and economic progress” as well as lasting “symbols of modernisation and humanity’s ability to control and use nature’s resources” (World Commission on Dams 9). Historian Daniel Klingensmith argues that dams “have become political symbols: symbols of the conquest of nature, of progress and of the modern state. And, especially, symbols of national empowerment and achievement” (2). This emphasis on progress is particularly obvious in the 1937 TVA propaganda film *The River*, written and directed by Pare Lorentz. In the film, the voiceover narration proclaims that hydroelectric plants provide “power for the farmers of the valley cut off from the advantages of urban life, power for the villages and cities and factories in the valley...power to make a new Tennessee Valley for a new generation. Power enough to make the river work.” Lorentz argues that hydroelectric plants provide “power to make a new Tennessee Valley” and to create an entirely “new generation” for the South; and in some ways THE TVA accomplished this. The TVA’s “industrialization of rivers” led to an accelerated industrial

revolution, making this particular area of the South a hub of the nation's manufacturing (Eva Jakobsson, qtd. in Turpin 40). Thus, if the South had been "left behind in the march of capitalist modernity" (178), as Leigh Anne Duck has argued, then the TVA helped to integrate the region into the nation's broader narrative of modernity.

However, national optimism diminished throughout the post-World War II period, as nuclear technologies and ecological crises led many Americans to question the widespread implementation of technocratic solutions to environmental issues, such as those utilized by the TVA.²¹ Therefore, postwar novels and films—particularly those of the postwar but pre-hippie generation—convey narratological ambivalence as they explore both the positive and negative ramifications of the TVA's brand of environmental containment culture. For example, in Elia Kazan's 1960 film *Wild River*,²² the TVA struggles to displace a Tennessee family as it plans a damming project that will flood a large region along the Tennessee River. Like so many TVA narratives, the film pits the positions of agrarianism and industrialization against one another. The perspective of the autochthonous agrarian is embodied by Ella Garth, the aging matriarch of the family being displaced. Ella refuses to leave her ancestral home despite the fact that the TVA has employed laws of eminent domain in order to seize the valley's land. Throughout the film, a TVA agent named Chuck Glover presents very pragmatic justifications for the damming project; for example, he states: "Sometimes it happens that we can't remain true to our beliefs without

²¹ Turpin notes that during the 20th century the shift from dams inspiring a sense of national pride to dams inspiring fears of destruction and national symbolic collapse was catalyzed by the fact that dams became targets of attack during World War II: "As early as 1937, dams supplying water and power to the industrial heartland of the Ruhr were seen as Germany's Achilles heel" (164). This fear remained prominent throughout the mid-century, and in 1972 the Geneva Conventions prohibited attacks on dams (168). Klingensmith argues that in recent years dams have remained simultaneously sites of fear and "icons of national self-identification and potency"; as an example, Klingensmith cites the fact that the post-9/11 U.S. government increasingly suspects that dams may become targets of terrorism and several foreign nationals have already been arrested while videoing or photographing dams (276).

²² The screenplay for *Wild River* is based on two novels about the TVA: William Bradford Huie's *Mud on the Stars* (1942) and Borden Deal's *Dunbar's Cove* (1957).

hurting maybe a great many people, and I'm afraid that this is one of those times... You know the Tennessee River has been a killer for years... Isn't it just plain common sense to want to harness it?... And it isn't just this dam; it's dam after dam after dam. We aim to tame this whole river!" Ella refutes his arguments, by asserting, "I like things running wild—like nature meant. There's already enough dams lockin' things up—tamin' 'em, makin' 'em go against their natural wants and needs. I'm again' dams of any kind." I contend that this sort of postwar film depicts a narratological ambivalence because it clearly presents both sides of the argument—the TVA versus the local, and the industrialist versus the agrarian.

However, as the modern environmental movement began to take off in the late 1960s and early 1970s, novels and films increasingly expressed ardent opposition to “containment culture,” an example of which, in the environmental context, was large-scale damming initiatives. Instead, they promoted a neo-romantic relationship to the natural world that embraced the wildness of free-flowing rivers. For example, in the 1972 film version of James Dickey's *Deliverance*, the characters believe that wild rivers can serve as a corrective to the ennui of their suburban lives, and this motivates in the characters an environmentalist impulse. In the opening scene of the film, the viewer hears a voiceover of Lewis (played by Burt Reynolds) disparaging the damming of the river, while simultaneously seeing footage of the construction of a dam:

You want to talk about the vanishing wilderness... They're gonna flood a whole valley, Bobby. They're drowning the river, man. It's just about the last wild, untamed, unpolluted, un-fucked up river in the South! They're gonna stop the river up. There ain't gonna be no more river. Just gonna be a big, dead lake... That ain't progress; that's shit. You push a little more power into Atlanta, a little more air-conditioning for your smug little suburb, and you know what's going to

happen? We're going to rape this whole goddamn landscape. We're going to rape it!²³

The idea that the natural world should serve as an escape from and corrective to the tedium of civilized life exists more broadly in postwar American culture and is encapsulated in the mid-century environmental legislation that I have already addressed, such as the Wilderness Act and the Wild and Scenic River Act. In *Deliverance*, Lewis becomes a mouthpiece for the environmental movement; however, the film is far from being an unproblematic environmentalist crusade. While the characters romanticize the wilderness and the role it plays in their psychological wellbeing, they treat the Appalachian natives they encounter with a universal sense of condescension. Therefore, the film contains a polemic against environmental colonialism, while also propagating cultural colonialism. In other words, the environment must be conserved for the sake of the suburbanites' recreation and psychological renewal, but the cultural steamrolling that the dam engenders is not a concern for the novel's protagonists who view southern Appalachia as a hinterland of culture that can and should be annihilated.²⁴

While this environmentalist message (albeit a conflicted one) emerged in the South, environmental platforms coming out of the American West were far more militant. This occurred because during the midcentury the TVA model had spread from the American South to the Southwest. In *Cadillac Desert: The American West and its Disappearing Water* (1986), Marc Reisner calls the postwar period the "age of dams," which reached its "apogee in the 1950s and 1960s, when hundreds upon hundreds of them were thrown up [in the West], forever altering the

²³ In the film, the Cahulawassee River is based on Coosawattee and Chattooga Rivers, both of which were targeted sites for damming projects.

²⁴ *Deliverance* presents slight narratological ambivalence in that Ed briefly challenges Lewis's speech at the beginning of the film. Ed notes that the dam could provide clean hydroelectric power and recreation. However, unlike *Wild River*, *Deliverance* consistently privileges Lewis's environmentalist message over Ed's objections.

face of the continent” (158-59). It is precisely this context that gave rise to America’s most radical figure in postwar environmental writing: Edward Abbey. While the dams in the West were not built by the TVA, they were based on the TVA model, and thus the TVA is partially culpable in the redesigned western as well as southern landscapes. In his popular 1975 novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey refers to the TVA as an example of “the oligarchs and oligopoly” of the US government: a “conglomerated cartel spread out upon half the planet Earth like a global kraken, pantentacled, wall-eyed and parrot-beaked, its brain a bank of computer data centers, its blood the flow of money, its heart a radioactive dynamo, its language the technetronic monologue of numbers imprinted on magnetic tape” (172). To combat what he sees as unwarranted and immoral environmental colonialism, Abbey promotes the use of extralegal protest tactics, including spiking trees, pulling up land developers’ survey stakes, cutting livestock fences, dismantling bulldozers, and blowing up bridges, railroad tracks, and pipelines.

In the years following Abbey’s death in 1989, dam building and by extension environmental containment culture in the U.S. have waned significantly. However, countries like India and China are creating dams at a rate unparalleled in human history, and in many cases they have self-consciously adopted the TVA as a model for their own hydrological projects. As in the context of the American South and West, the artists of India and China have begun examining how such environmental alterations are engendering vast cultural shifts. Contemporary environmental activists in China and India—for example, Dai Qing and Arundhati Roy²⁵—are increasingly resisting the damming of their nations’ rivers, and thus they are adopting radical protest tactics similar to Edward Abbey’s. In order to understand the

²⁵ In *Yangtze! Yangtze!* (1989), Chinese journalist Dai Qing argues that the Three Gorges Dam was the most socially and environmentally irresponsible project ever undertaken in human history. Arundhati Roy’s *The Cost of Living* (1999) makes a similar argument about the Sardar Sarovar Dams on the Narmada River in India. I discuss Roy’s critique of this damming project in more detail in the coda to this dissertation.

globalization of hydropolitics, it is imperative that we study the cultural and artistic responses to American hydropolitics within the context of the 1960s and 1970s. Such responses reveal the ontological significance of encounters with the natural world and may even illuminate tactics for exacting both social and environmental justice in the future.

CHAPTER I

Deep Hydrologies in Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle*

“In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant”

- Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*

My dissertation begins with a pairing that may seem improbable: Rachel Carson, whose best-known book *Silent Spring* (1962) is almost universally acknowledged as having launched the modern environmental movement,²⁶ and Kurt Vonnegut, whose sardonic novels of the 1960s and 1970s came to epitomize many Cold War-era countercultures, particularly those opposed to international military engagements (Freese 227; Sumner 81). However, I contend that Carson's *Silent Spring* and Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963) can be productively placed in dialogue with one another, and that Vonnegut, like Carson, can and should be read as an important figure in the

²⁶ For example, Leo Marx states that *Silent Spring* is “a book said to mark the inception of today's environmental movement” (380). Gary Kroll similarly says, “The claim that Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) played a crucial role in outlining the fundamental tenets of modern environmentalism is now almost universally accepted” (403). Likewise, Daniel J. Philippon asserts, “Widely recognized as the book that launched the modern environmental movement, *Silent Spring* also employed the conventions of dystopia or antiutopia, which in modern times has sought to alert its readers to the horrors of industrial and scientific ‘progress’” (231).

development of postwar environmental thinking. To date, these two writers have not been the collective subject of any substantive critical endeavor, and in general scholars have neglected to consider Vonnegut's role in the fledgling environmental movement of the early 1960s. My chapter seeks to fill this gap by exploring *Silent Spring* and *Cat's Cradle* as protest texts, both of which align Cold War nuclear anxieties with growing apprehension over ecological crises in order to elevate environmental concerns to the level of militaristic threats.

Both Carson and Vonnegut highlight postwar environmental anxieties by drawing readers' attention to the vulnerabilities of the earth's ecosystems. These vulnerabilities became a subject of particular concern during the period when Carson and Vonnegut were writing, as the relatively new field of ecology was increasingly demonstrating the fact that the earth's ecosystems are all interconnected and interdependent.²⁷ Advancements in the understanding of global ecology proved that environmental degradation in one seemingly isolated location can literally impact ecosystems everywhere. These connections affect not only environmental issues but also the way individuals conceive of national and global politics and culture. Understanding that the planet's ecosystems are infinitely connected necessitates thinking beyond boundaries between the self and other, between humans and the environment, and between regions, nations, continents, and hemispheres.

In order to communicate environmental connectivity, Carson and Vonnegut both center their texts on anxieties about water management. Evoking W.H. Auden's 1947 poem, Jessica Wang highlights the idea that the postwar generation was "The Age of Anxiety." Within this cultural context, environmental anxieties were often overlooked due to the immediacy and

²⁷ While modern ecology did not fully explain global biospherical connectivity until the mid-twentieth century, the idea that humans are separate from nature has been challenged for far longer. In particular, Darwin's mid-nineteenth-century introduction of the theory of evolution made it clear that humans are and always have been part of the entire web of biological processes at work on the planet. See Marx's "The Idea of Nature in America" 13).

totalizing destruction threatened by nuclear technologies: “the destructive force of the atom suggested that any future international conflict could prove so cataclysmic as to be too horrible to comprehend” (Wang 1). Yet, in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995), Lawrence Buell notes that “In the Cold War era, ecocide was always a more serious threat than nuclear destruction” (7). Carson and Vonnegut display an awareness of the all-too-real possibility of ecocide—the irreversible destruction of the earth’s biosphere—and they are both principally concerned with the threat of water-borne contagions.²⁸ In *Silent Spring* and *Cat’s Cradle*, these contagions originate at very definite points in the environment, but they soon spread so pervasively throughout interconnected ecosystems that the contamination becomes, according to Carson, “universal” (6, 41). Because contaminants are spread through aquatic ecosystems across the planet, regardless of arbitrary national boundaries created by humans, hydrologies quickly transcend environmental categories and become political and cultural concerns as well. Carson’s and Vonnegut’s interests in hydrological anxieties not only demonstrate the advancements in ecology at the time; their emphases on global hydrological connectivity also convey early understandings of deep ecology and network theory that would emerge in the mid 1970s to explain social as well as environmental interconnections and interdependencies.

Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*

Water dominated Rachel Carson’s ecological, political, and philosophical views throughout her career. Her hydrocentric imagination may best be understood through a brief consultation of her biography. Carson’s interest in environmental preservation developed throughout her childhood in Pittsburgh during the second wave of the industrial revolution,

²⁸ Of course, both Carson and Vonnegut were acutely concerned with nuclear annihilation as well as ecocide.

which brought with it the decimation of many of the area's natural resources. According to one of Carson's biographers, Linda Lear, "The experience made her forever suspicious of promises of 'better living through chemistry' and of claims that technology would create a progressively brighter future" (xiii). At the Pennsylvania College for Women, Carson first studied English and steeped herself in British Romantic literature; however, she ultimately decided to major in biology (xi). In graduate school at Johns Hopkins University, she studied zoology and genetics, with a focus on marine biology (xii). After receiving her master's degree, Carson had to leave graduate school without obtaining her Ph.D., and seek employment in order to provide income for her struggling family. After leaving Johns Hopkins, Carson began writing articles about natural history for the *Baltimore Sun* and other papers (xii). Additionally, she started working as a writer and junior aquatic biologist for the Federal Bureau of Fisheries—an agency that later became the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service—where she researched and wrote principally about the ways in which industrial pollution disrupts aquatic ecosystems (xiii).

Before *Silent Spring*, Carson published two hydrocentric books about oceanography, *The Sea Around Us* (1951) and *The Edge of the Sea* (1955), both of which sold well and garnered tremendous critical success, thus making her "the foremost science writer in America" (Lear xiv).²⁹ In particular, *The Sea Around Us* brought Carson great notoriety after the book received a John Burroughs Medal and the National Book Award for Nonfiction (Norwood 335). In *The Sea Around Us*, Carson suggests that humans are so strongly drawn to the sea because the elements of sea water are similar to those of human blood: "Fish, amphibian, and reptile, warm-blooded bird and mammals—each of us carries in our veins a salty stream in which the elements sodium,

²⁹ *The Sea Around Us* was also made into a documentary which won an Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1953 (Norwood 335).

potassium, and calcium are combined in almost the same proportions as sea water” (qtd. in Norwood 336). Additionally, Carson says that the development of each individual replicates the broader evolution of humankind: “each of us begins his individual life in a miniature ocean within his mother’s womb, and in the stages of embryonic development repeats the stages by which his race evolved, from gill-breathing inhabitants of a water world to creatures able to live on land” (qtd. in Norwood 336).³⁰ Moreover, Buell argues that “The idea of the sea attracted Carson, as the idea of the wilderness had attracted Thoreau, as a mysterious domain beyond human control” (291). In *The Sea Around Us*, Carson states that “Man has returned to his mother sea only on her own terms. He cannot control or change the ocean, as in his brief tenancy of earth, he has subdued and plundered the continents” (qtd. in Buell 291).³¹ However, Carson was unable to sustain this optimistic stance. Between 1951, when she published *The Sea Around Us*, and 1962, when *Silent Spring* appeared, Carson realized that radioactive wastes were increasingly polluting the planet’s oceans and that the types of totalizing devastation that beset the land can and likely will beset the oceans as well (Norwood 337-38; Buell 291). As I argue at length later in this chapter, Carson’s understanding of the vulnerabilities of aquatic ecosystems resulted in her writing about water in particularly innovative ways in her third and final hydrocentric book, *Silent Spring*.

³⁰ Some recent feminist scholars, such as Cecelia Tichi, have argued that there is a “vocabulary found from the nineteenth century and continuing through the twentieth in the gynecological-obstetrical literature of allopathic medicine. One woman physician recommended a hard bed, elevated and warmed feet, and nonstimulating diet as treatment for ‘flooding,’ a recurrent term in the allopathic literature, as is ‘gushing’ and phrases on ‘blood that flowed in a stream,’ of ‘excessive’ and ‘immoderate flow.’ Because the medical terms replicate those found in texts on environmental waters, there is a certain interchangeable vocabulary of riparian and female functions. Rivers and lakes are presented as exhibiting the very pathological symptoms of women’s reproductive health crises. There are the ‘swollen’ streams and tributaries contributing to ‘great flood,’ including the Mississippi River headwaters area. Waters are ‘turbid’ and ‘discharge’ themselves. Streams flow ‘sluggishly’ and need to rest but require ‘drainage’” (7-8).

³¹ In “Sea Trash, Dark Pools, and the Tragedy of the Commons” (2010), Patricia Yaeger provides an intellectual history of the transition from viewing the sea as sublime and unalterable to understanding its vulnerabilities.

Carson's *Silent Spring*, which was serialized in *The New Yorker* in June of 1962 and then published in book form in September,³² begins with a short chapter entitled "A Fable for Tomorrow." Unlike the book's remaining chapters, which clinically synthesize numerous scientific studies about the harmful effects of wide-spread pesticide usage, "A Fable for Tomorrow" tells the story of "a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings" (1). This quintessentially American town does not retain this pastoral harmony with its environment for long; instead, Carson depicts an apocalyptic fairy tale, in which "a strange blight crept over the area and everything began to change. Some evil spell had settled on the community" (2). The result of this "blight" or "evil spell" is that by spring the animal life of the town had all perished, so that "It was a spring without voices...only silence lay over the field and woods and marsh." In the conclusion of this chapter, Carson abandons the use of fairy-tale rhetoric: "No witchcraft, no enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves" (3). Therefore, Carson sets the book up as "an attempt to explain" (3) how and why parts of the country have experienced such a "silent spring" as well as what people need to do to combat a dangerous trend that could reach across the nation and even the globe. Diana Newell argues that Carson constructs this "science fiction-like prologue" (202) so that the imagined narrative transpires in the near future, thus lending it a sense of immediacy: "Like her post-war contemporaries in science fiction, Carson and her editors would have understood the popular appeal of what were images of the very near future.

³² Gary Kroll explains that there were actually three iterations of *Silent Spring*—the serialized version in *The New Yorker*, the book, and a CBS television exposé—all of which had distinct audiences with arguments tailored for each: "The serialized version of the book was geared to an urban audience, and its salient message was that pesticides posed a threat to the individual's body through ingestion of staple foods coated with cancer-causing chemicals. A suburban 'Silent Spring' was manifested by the book itself—largely distributed by the Book-of-the-Month Club—which outlined the dangers presented to personal property, home, and family within the context of a post-war domestic ideology. Finally, the televised 'Silent Spring' introduced a mass audience to a philosophical discussion about the problems created when science assumes an arrogant confidence in its ability to control nature... In the end, the many 'Silent Springs' transcended the local problems of pesticide use by speaking to several constituencies within America's diverse populace" (404).

The near future was a popular literary device in post-war science fiction, and was employed with great effect in novels of the 1950s” (203). Newell cites the British science fiction writer Brian Stableford, who says that in literature the near future is “an uncomfortable imaginative space for writers and readers to inhabit” (qtd. in Newell 203).

Following the first chapter’s illustration of the need to forestall ecological disaster in the near future, Carson next explains that in the long history of the planet, humans have only in the last century developed such technologies that they could literally alter the earth’s ecosystems:

This history of life on earth has been a history of interaction between living things and their surroundings. To a large extent, the physical form and the habits of the earth’s vegetation and its animal life have been molded by the environment. Considering the whole span of early time, the opposite effect, in which life actually modifies its surroundings, has been relatively slight. Only within the moment of time represented by the present century has one species—man—acquired significant power to alter the nature of his world. (5)

In Carson’s history of the Earth, humans as well as all other forms of life have been “molded” by the natural world that surrounds them. Only in recent decades, however, have humans gained the technological might to alter the natural world so irrevocably. Carson’s analysis in this passage is strikingly similar to more recent theorizations of the Anthropocene, which contemporary ecologists define as a new geological epoch characterized by humans’ alterations of the earth’s ecosystems. At present, geologists do not agree about a particular starting date for the Anthropocene. While some geologists point out that humans began substantially altering the ecosystems of the planet when they developed agriculture, which would set the beginning of the Anthropocene several thousand years in the past, many geologists agree that a more accurate

starting date for this period of human influence is the late eighteenth century due to the Industrial Revolution.

Carson focuses most of her attention in *Silent Spring* on the rise of twentieth-century chemical technologies that have resulted in large-scale pollution of the natural world: “The most alarming of all man’s assaults upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and the sea with dangerous and even lethal materials” (5-6). In particular, she examines two large groups of chemical pesticides: chlorinated hydrocarbons (such as DDT) and organic phosphorus insecticides (such as malathion and parathion) (18).³³ She argues that due to the use of nuclear weaponry and pesticides, the environment is now marked by a contamination that has become so “universal” that she calls the mid-twentieth century “the age of poisons” (174). Furthermore, she states that in “man’s war against nature” (7), humanity has used chemicals to such an extent that it has inadvertently altered “the very nature of the world—the very nature of its life” (6). The chlorinated hydrocarbons and organic phosphorus insecticides used during the midcentury in the United States were so harmful that Carson contends “They should not be called ‘insecticides,’ but ‘biocides’” (8), for they disrupt not only the pests at which they are aimed but also the health of all flora and fauna across the country and the world.

One of the primary reasons that *Silent Spring* disturbed midcentury readers is that Carson portrays in vivid detail and with numerous scientific sources just how pervasive exposure to chemicals had become in postwar America. Those exposed to chlorinated hydrocarbons such as DDT were not simply farm workers or even those living near farms; Carson demonstrates that

³³ Leo Marx argues that Carson provides a “variant of the machine-in-the-garden trope,” and that “the initial surrogate for the machine is ‘a white granular powder’ falling from the sky, a substance Carson associates, a few pages later, with Strontium 90, a by-product of nuclear explosions. In the body of the book, however, she makes DDT and other deadly pesticides, as well as the entire chemical industry, exemplars of modern industrial society’s ‘war against nature.’ That the founding text of the emerging environmental movement was framed in this way suggests the prominent role played by pastoral ideals in general, and by the machine-in-the-garden trope in particular, in the rhetoric accompanying the imminent explosion of countercultural activism” (380-381).

these chemicals permeate virtually all landscapes. Also, because they are in food and water supplies, they are present in most people as well. The storage of these chemicals in the body results in bioaccumulation; the poisons enter the body slowly and in very small quantities, but because they are rarely cleansed, they tend to amass over time and produce detrimental health effects: “Storage of chlorinated hydrocarbons, as we have seen, is cumulative, beginning with the smallest intake. The toxic materials become lodged in all the fatty tissues of the body. When these reserves of fat are drawn upon the poison may then strike quickly” (190). One particularly detrimental effect of these chemicals is cancer. Carson cites one researcher who argues that humans are living in a “sea of carcinogens” (239), and she describes many cases throughout *Silent Spring* to prove that pesticides are causing cancer at alarming rates (222).³⁴ Carson holds that “The chemical agents of cancer have become entrenched in our world in two ways: first, and ironically, through man’s search for a better and easier way of life; second, because the manufacture and sale of chemicals has become an accepted part of our economy and our way of life” (242). In addition to cancer, Carson also discusses the risk of pesticides altering human genetics, and she even argues that “genetic deterioration through man-made agents is the menace of our time, ‘the last and greatest danger to our civilization’” (208). Carson explains that some pesticides are actually “classified as ‘mutagens,’ or agents capable of modifying the genes, the materials of heredity” (36-37). As a result of this potential threat, she queries, “We are rightly appalled by the genetic effects of radiation; how then, can we be indifferent to the same effect in chemicals that we disseminate widely in our environment?” (37).

Carson’s comparison here of chemical pollution to radiation is by no means arbitrary; in fact, throughout *Silent Spring*, she often links detrimental health effects such as cancer and

³⁴ Carson herself was fighting breast cancer while writing *Silent Spring* (Lear xvii). Buell states, “That Carson knew herself to be suffering from terminal cancer during the latter stages of working on *Silent Spring*, must have intensified her rage at the suffering inflicted on others’ bodies, and on earth’s body” (*The Environmental* 292).

genetic deterioration to radiation. This evocation of radiation reminds the reader that chemicals, including pesticides, are actually “the sinister and little recognized partners of radiation,” as they penetrate the body in ways similar to how radiation enters the body after a nuclear explosion (6). Thus, in addition to connecting pesticides to radiation on a literal level, Carson further emphasizes the connection in order to draw upon the increasingly acute Cold War fears of nuclear radiation, both from actual attacks and from domestic testing.³⁵ *Silent Spring* was published in the era of the Cuban Missile Crisis—the apex of nuclear anxiety—and in numerous passages throughout the book, Carson links environmental concerns to a broader Cold War climate of anxiety.³⁶ For instance, she states, “Along with the possibility of the extinction of mankind by nuclear war, the central problem of our age has therefore become the contamination of man’s total environment with such substances of incredible potential for harm...” (8). Furthermore, the connection between pesticides and warfare is more substantive than many people realize. Carson explains that pesticides proliferated on an industrial scale during World War II: “In the course of developing agents of chemical warfare, some of the chemicals created in the laboratory were found to be lethal to insects. The discovery did not come by chance: insects were widely used to test chemicals as agents of death for man” (16).³⁷ Indiscriminate

³⁵ Drawing upon Paul Boyer’s *By The Bomb’s Early Light: American Thought and Culture at the Dawn of the Nuclear Age* (1985), Diana Newell explains that there were two “cycles” of responses to nuclear technologies in the U.S. after the bombing of Hiroshima: “The great source of anxiety in this first cycle was fear of atomic attack. Boyer identifies a second cycle of atomic concern that runs from 1957 to 1962, when nuclear weapons for the second time emerged as a central cultural theme. Marking this second wave was the widespread and profound public anxiety about radioactive fallout from US nuclear tests in the Pacific, which began in the mid-1950s, and the Soviet-US space race. Public anxiety peaked with US President John Kennedy’s massive fallout shelter programme and the Cuban Missile Crisis in the opening years of the 1960s, and abated with the signing of the Limited Test Ban Treaty of 1963” (Newell 194).

³⁶ M. Jimmie Killingsworth argues that “Perhaps the spirit of the age, as well as the connection between nuclear fear and environmentalism, was best captured in the seriocomic T-shirt slogan NUKE THE WHALES!” (363).

³⁷ Carson later explains that in the late 1930s the German chemist Gerhard Schrader discovered the insecticidal uses of certain chemicals: “Almost immediately the German government recognized the value of these same chemicals as

spraying of pesticides from planes became common after World War II not only because of the development of these new chemicals, but also because of “the abundance of surplus planes” that had been used in the war (155).³⁸

Throughout *Silent Spring*, Carson evokes military imagery by mimicking the rhetoric of war reportage (Buell, *The Environmental* 293). For instance, when discussing the “push-button ease” (175) with which midcentury Americans employed pesticidal “death-dealing materials” (174), she simultaneously critiques new military technologies, most notably the atomic bomb. Furthermore, when Carson examines the indiscriminate spraying of pesticides, she could just as easily be describing the air raids of World War II: “Not only the target insect or plant, but anything—human or nonhuman—within the range of the chemical fallout may know the sinister touch of the poison. Not only forests and cultivated fields are sprayed, but towns and cities as well” (156). Additionally, Carson aligns the pesticide spray gun with the machine gun: “Under the philosophy that now seems to guide our destinies, nothing must get in the way of the man with the spray gun” (85). Buell notes that “Such cause-and-effect links between war and pollution led Carson to draw a moral analogy between the two” (293). Carson’s attempts to connect Cold War military threats with environmental threats proved highly effective with many readers who understood, as Carson surely did, that poisoning our bodies and environments with chemicals could undo America’s burgeoning power as quickly and completely as an attack from

new and devastating weapons in man’s war against his own kind, then the work on them was declared secret. Some became the deadly nerve gases. Others, of closely allied structure, became insecticides” (28).

³⁸ Kroll argues that the widespread use of chemical pesticides and the fact that they were sprayed so universally from planes made the issue receive close attention from middle-class Americans. As a result, pesticides began to be regarded as a threat to middle-class notions of American domesticity: “Moreover, the suburban home had become a key tenet to a ‘domestic ideology’ in Cold War America, a site of ‘containment,’ preserving both the stability of the American family and the family’s potential for enjoying material prosperity. Pesticides posed a direct threat to that ideology. Akin to the dangers of nuclear radiation and communism, pesticides endangered the health and security of the American suburban family—the message clearly enunciated in the suburban reading of ‘*Silent Spring*’” (409).

abroad. After all, as I have already mentioned, “In the Cold War era, ecocide was always a more serious threat than nuclear destruction” (Buell 7).

However, during the late 1950s and early 1960s, many resisted Carson’s plea to curb the use of chemicals in the U.S. At that time, the chemical industry, which had developed largely because of the war, was generating new technologies and adding massive revenue to the economy. As a result, many Americans supported this industry, as they had increasingly placed their trust so unquestioningly in science more generally to solve the nation’s problems: “DDT enabled the conquest of insect pests in agriculture and of ancient insect-borne disease just as surely as the atomic bomb destroyed America’s military enemies” (Lear x-xi). According to Edward O. Wilson, environmental concerns often failed to attract serious attention during this period of prosperity, optimism, and seemingly endless growth: “To a populace whose forebears had within living memory colonized the interior of a vast continent and whose country had never lost a war, arguments for limit and constraint seemed almost unpatriotic” (357-58).

Instead of the widespread use of chemicals that were known to have detrimental effects throughout ecosystems, Carson advised that we seek to emulate the controls that are already in place in the natural world. As alternatives to chemicals, Carson promoted the use of “*biological* solutions, based on understanding of the living organisms they seek to control, and of the whole fabric of life to which these organisms belong” (278). Biological controls can include male sterilization (279), naturally occurring insect venoms, attractants and repellents (285), bacterial infections (288), viruses (290), and natural insect parasites and predators (291-96). In the final passages of *Silent Spring*, Carson alludes to Robert Frost’s “The Road Not Taken” to describe an alternative approach to environmental preservation: “The road we have long been traveling is deceptively easy, a smooth superhighway on which we progress with great speed, but at its end

lies disaster. The other fork of the road—the one ‘less traveled by’—offers our last, our only chance to reach a destination that assures the preservation of our earth” (277). Despite Carson’s compelling and well researched arguments throughout *Silent Spring*, many scientists dismissed her calls to action.

In particular, the scientific community often disregarded Carson’s conclusions because women were generally not afforded equal status in this male-dominated field. In “‘Silence, Miss Carson!’ Science, Gender, and the Reception of ‘*Silent Spring*’” (2001), Michael B. Smith examines the ways in which academics and the popular media received and reviewed Carson’s work, and he argues that “this reception illuminates quite starkly the gendered ways Western culture has constructed science” (734). From the time of its initial serialized publication in the summer of 1962, Carson’s work was attacked by many journalists and academics. The former critiqued her work, according to Smith, because they were “defenders of cold war-inflected notions of progress and justified means to ends” (737), and they did not want environmental meddlers disrupting “the extraordinary standard of living Americans were experiencing by the early 1960s” (744). Carson also threatened members of traditional academic communities “because she was a woman, an independent scholar whose sex and lack of institutional ties placed her outside the nexus of the production and application of conventional scientific knowledge” (734). In fact, throughout her career, Carson signed her articles R.L. Carson so that people would assume she was a man (Lear xiv).

Additionally, Carson aroused skepticism within certain branches of the sciences because much of her training was in ecology—a field that was not always “accorded scholarly legitimacy” during the mid twentieth century (Lear xii). Ecology is first and foremost invested in determining the interconnections among seemingly far-flung facets of the biosphere. In *Silent*

Spring, Carson herself defined ecology as “reflect[ing] the web of life—or death” (189). In his 1971 book *The Closing Circle*, Barry Commoner describes the “laws” of ecology, the first and foremost of which is that “Everything is connected to everything else” (qtd. in Devall and Sessions 87). In the early 1960s, however, notions of interconnectedness were not widely accepted; for example, Paul Sears refers to ecology as a “subversive subject because its emphasis on the interconnectedness of the earth’s ecosystems diminished the strength of humans’ claims to species separateness and superiority” (qtd. in Devall and Sessions 86). In more recent decades, ecologists’ investigation of interconnectedness has proven to be a significant development in contemporary science: “The major contribution of the science of ecology ... has been the rediscovery within the modern scientific context that everything is connected to everything else. Thus, as a science, ecology provided a view of Nature that was lacking in the discrete, reductionist approach to Nature of the other sciences” (Devall and Sessions 85).

Ecology’s emphasis on the interdependencies of systems is similarly foundational to contemporary network theory. For example, in a lecture entitled “The Power of Networks: Knowledge in an Age of Infinite Interconnectedness” delivered at the British Royal Society for the Encouragement of the Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce (RSA), Manuel Lima discusses the importance of networks and network thinking in an age that is increasingly complex and therefore difficult to map. Lima argues that trees have historically been “important knowledge classification systems...mapping the blood ties between people, mapping the main characters and stories told in the Bible, mapping the main areas of science, and even mapping the species that exist on the planet.” Furthermore, he explains that trees are significant metaphors because they demonstrate humans’ desire for “order, symmetry, hierarchy, simplicity, balance, and unity.” However, Lima acknowledges that the contemporary world is facing a paradigm shift, in

which the tree is not an adequate metaphor for understanding the complexities of life on earth. Since “trees are no longer able to accommodate the inherent complexities of the modern world,” Lima proposes turning toward the metaphor of the network to explain contemporary life and the environment. The tree metaphor no longer suffices in describing how our ecosystems function, because instead of seeing simplified predator-prey relationships, we instead understand that ecosystems interact in complex networks that encompass a seemingly endless web of interdependent systems. Lima argues that Darwin’s illustration of “the tree of life,” which is featured in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), does not explain the interdependencies of ecosystems. Even seemingly disparate species are tied together in ecosystems and thus cannot be portrayed as inhabiting separate branches of a tree. As a result, since the mid-twentieth century, scientists have relied with increasing frequency on “the web of life” or “the network of life” rather than “the tree of life.”

Networks are particularly significant because of their rhizomatic qualities, which are acentered and nonhierarchical. Scientific research in recent decades has confirmed not only that these rhizomatic networks exist in ecosystems but also that they are far more integrated than scientists previously believed.³⁹ These complex networks manifest themselves in ways both small and vast—from individual cells to entire bodies, and from the earth’s biosphere to the universe. Lima states that “Networks are truly everywhere”; the network is *the* “omnipresent structure” that can assist us in explaining both biological and social communities. Lima even argues that scientists who are mapping networks have begun to influence artists working in

³⁹ Lima cites a 1948 article “Science and Complexity,” in which American scientist Warren Weaver divides twentieth-century science into two stages. The early part of the century is marked by an understanding of the earth’s elements as being chaotic and random and thus governed by a “disorganized complexity.” The second stage of the twentieth century, which continues into the present, is marked by the understanding that all elements of the earth are interdependent and that the earth’s systems are governed by an “organized complexity.”

various media: “Networks are really becoming a cultural meme in their own right. We could even argue that this is the birth of a new movement—the birth of networkism.”

Lima’s analysis of networks is representative of one way that this “omnipresent structure” has been theorized in recent years. But the notion of interconnected ecosystems has been discussed with regularity and with increasing scientific rigor since the field of ecology began to blossom after World War II. Carson was on the cusp of this emerging field: particularly in *Silent Spring* (but also to a certain extent in her previous texts), she articulates what at the time was a radical understanding of environmental networks. Consistently throughout *Silent Spring*, she notes that “The earth’s vegetation is part of a web of life in which there are intimate and essential relations between plants and the earth, between plants and other plants, between plants and animals. Sometimes we have no choice but to disturb these relationships, but we should do so thoughtfully, with full awareness that what we do may have consequences remote in time and place” (64). While Carson’s work is significant in the broad intellectual history and development of the field of ecology, I will focus on Carson’s radical ideas about interconnected systems. Specifically, I contend that Carson’s awareness of the infinite connections among these systems resulted directly from her lifelong study of aquatic ecology. Without this fascination with hydrological systems, Carson may not have developed the same environmental philosophy, lacking which the American environmental imagination as a whole may have been very different.

Silent Spring is a book obsessed with water, and it consistently emphasizes the importance of water purity more than that of any other element. While Carson does discuss the migration of chemical pesticides through the air and soil, she focuses far more attention on the ways in which they travel through water, because it is water that most often transfers these

poisons from one ecosystem to another. Thus, water demonstrates to Carson—and many other midcentury scientists and theorists—how interconnected even the most seemingly disparate elements of the biosphere truly are.

From the earliest chapters of *Silent Spring*, Carson asserts the indispensability of water to her documentation of the detrimental effects of environmental contamination: “In the less than two decades of their use, the synthetic pesticides have been so thoroughly distributed throughout the animate and inanimate world that they occur virtually everywhere. They have been recovered from most of the major river systems and even from streams of groundwater flowing unseen through the earth” (15). In this early passage, Carson’s concern with water contamination trumps worries about all other elements of the natural world. This emphasis continues throughout the book as Carson repeatedly demonstrates the precariousness of natural systems as well as the necessity of water to the health of these systems. Because water so often acts as a conduit among ecological networks, contamination is quite literally an omnipresent threat. In what is likely her most hydrocentric chapter, “Surface Waters and Underground Seas,” Carson argues that “Of all natural resources water has become the most precious” (39). She points out the paradox that while the earth is largely enveloped by oceans, “in the midst of this plenty we are in want” (39); and indeed this want is increasing each year as the world’s populations grow and as the planet’s waters become more and more polluted. Carson explains some of the primary sources of this pollution:

The problem of water pollution by pesticides can be understood only in context, as part of the whole to which it belongs—the pollution of the total environment of mankind. The pollution entering our waterways comes from many sources: radioactive wastes from reactors, laboratories, and hospitals; fallout from nuclear

explosions; domestic wastes from cities and towns; chemical wastes from factories. To these is added a new kind of fallout—the chemical sprays applied to croplands and gardens, forests and fields. Many of the chemical agents in this alarming mélange imitate and augment the harmful effects of radiation, and within the groups of chemicals themselves there are sinister and little-understood interactions, transformations, and summations of effect. (39)

Thus, the pollution of the world’s water supplies is particularly upsetting when we understand the earth “in context”—as consisting of a series of ecosystems and hydrologies that are infinitely connected.

Carson discusses these infinitely connected hydrologies repeatedly throughout *Silent Spring* to argue that chemical pollution can never be contained within a particular location. She describes all of the earth’s hydrologies as participating in “the universal seaward movement” (40), which carries with it any and all contaminants, spreading them throughout aquatic ecosystems while on their way to the sea.⁴⁰ As a result, Carson contends, all of the earth’s ecosystems are now polluted by pesticides: “whether detected or not, the pesticides are there, and as might be expected with any materials applied to land surfaces on so vast a scale, they have now found their way into many and perhaps all of the major river systems of the country” (41). In addition to pollutants in our river systems, Carson asserts that this contamination is an issue for the largest conceivable aquatic ecosystems: “[O]ur waters have become almost universally contaminated with insecticides” (41). Other than rivers and streams, Carson argues that “In the entire water-pollution problem, there is probably nothing more disturbing than the threat of widespread contamination of groundwater. It is not possible to add pesticides to water anywhere

⁴⁰ Carson also states, “And when millions of tons of poisonous chemicals are applied to the surface of the land, it is inevitable that some of them will find their way into the ceaseless cycle of waters moving between land and sea” (139).

without threatening the purity of water everywhere” (42). Carson explains that this universalizing threat to water purity results from the fact that the natural world “operate[s] in closed and separate compartments, and she has not done so in distributing the earth’s water supply” (42). The contamination of groundwater is so “disturbing” because most rain water falling to earth is filtered through the soil and ends up being part of a vast subsurface sea, which ultimately feeds into all of the earth’s streams and rivers: “And so, in a very real and frightening sense, pollution of the groundwater is pollution of water everywhere” (42). Carson ultimately suggests that we reconsider our understanding of water and water contamination by seeing it within its broadest possible ecological context:

Water must also be thought of in terms of the chains of life it supports—from the small-as-dust green cells of the drifting plant plankton, through the minute water fleas to the fishes that strain plankton from the water and are in turn eaten by other fishes or by birds, mink, raccoons—in an endless cyclic transfer of materials from life to life. We know that the necessary minerals in the water are so passed from link to link of the food chains. Can we suppose that poisons we introduce into water will not also enter into these cycles of nature? (46)

Such an exemplification of systemic or network thinking is one of Carson’s greatest contributions to ecology and environmentalism.

Carson was by no means the first ecologist to consider the environment a vast interconnected and interdependent network; in fact, much of *Silent Spring* is a synthesis of other scientists’ research rather than original studies or even theses of her own (Smith 744). Nevertheless, her widely-read work certainly inspired environmental activism and radical new formulations of environmental philosophy in the early 1960s. Recent scholars even contend that

Silent Spring “can probably date the beginnings of the ‘Age of Ecology’” (Devall and Sessions 94). Carson even led President Kennedy to launch federal investigations after he heard of *Silent Spring*, and those investigations confirmed many of her warnings about the dangers of pesticides (Smith 743). Additionally, the concern generated by *Silent Spring* led directly to a ban on the domestic production of DDT (Lear xvii), and the book “also became a national political force, largely responsible for the establishment of the Environmental Protection Agency in 1970” (Wilson 361; see also Smith 747). Equally significant is the fact that *Silent Spring* was read by thousands of Americans, and it altered the way many thought about their relationship to the environment. In doing so, it undoubtedly paved the way for the environmental movement that would blossom in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁴¹

One unique facet of Carson’s approach to the scientific material in *Silent Spring* is that she emphasizes the ethical and ontological ramifications of her research in order to demonstrate the inextricability of human identity from our relationship with the natural world. Moreover, she constantly questions whether science and technology were changing more quickly than humans’ ethical understanding of cultures and environments. Thus, Carson repeatedly asks ethical and philosophical questions in the midst of her otherwise objective analysis of pesticides. This approach to scientific quandries was atypical in that scientific research often neglects to consider self-reflectively the larger ramifications of new technologies. For instance, Carson states, “The question is whether any civilization can wage relentless war on life without destroying itself, and without losing the right to be called civilized” (99). She also makes this argument personal and individualized: “By acquiescing in an act that can cause such suffering to a living creature, who

⁴¹ Buell notes that “Through commentators disagree on how radical and how long-lasting an impact *Silent Spring* had on the production and use of environment-degrading chemicals, the book manifestly precipitated both immediate legislative action and organized environmental radicalism...” (295).

among us is not diminished as a human being?" (100). In the final pages of *Silent Spring*, Carson stresses humans' need to evaluate the use of new life-altering and death-dealing technologies:

the practitioners of chemical control ... have brought to their task no 'high-minded orientation,' no humility before the vast forces with which they tamper... The 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man. The concepts and practices of applied entomology for the most part date from the Stone Age of science. It is our alarming misfortune that so primitive a science has armed itself with the most modern and terrible weapons, and that in turning them against insects it has also turned them against the earth. (297)

The closing passages of *Silent Spring*, including this one, typify Carson's tendency to evoke Cold War imagery and technological anxieties. Moreover, they bring to the fore of public consciousness Cold War fears of an actual apocalypse.

Buell observes that while apocalyptic narratives were becoming popular by the early 1960s, when Carson was writing *Silent Spring*, her narrative was exceptional in that she explained the potential for an apocalyptic scenario that would be caused by environmental degradation: "Others had portrayed doomsday by bomb and holocaust; Carson invented doomsday by environmental genocide" (*The Environmental* 295).⁴² Furthermore, Buell argues that Carson's apocalyptic fears were based first and foremost on her understanding of the

⁴² Buell also argues that *Silent Spring* is an example of dystopian literature: "These are the bases of late twentieth-century environmental dystopianism: (1) the vision of exploitation leading to 'overshoot' (excessive demands on the land) and interference producing irreversible degradation, (2) the vision of a tampered-with nature recoiling against humankind in a kind of return of the repressed, and (3) the loss of all escape routes. Carson voices all these fears. We are poisoning ourselves irretrievably; we are producing pesticide-resistant insects our poisons cannot control; we are all infected" (308).

interconnections among the earth's ecosystems: "Just as the metaphor of the web of interdependence is central to the ethical force of the contemporary ecocentric critique of anthropocentrism, so is the metaphor of apocalypse central to ecocentrism's projection of the future of a civilization that refuses to transform itself according to the doctrine of the web" (284-85). In other words, if a given civilization fails to consider the web-like connections that bind all ecosystems, then its environmentally irresponsible and unsustainable actions could result in an actual apocalypse. Carson's principal fear was that pesticides' diffusion throughout the environment, particularly its aquatic ecosystems, might cause such irreparable damage that life on earth, both human and nonhuman, may in the near future face extinction. Her solution to this imminent threat was not simply to halt the use of pesticides like DDT in the U.S. In addition, Carson desired a much more radical change in that she hoped to increase humans' sensitivity to the natural world and ultimately to inspire people to adopt a more humble attitude toward the environment. According to Carson, if people could see their place within broader networks of human and nonhuman communities, then they could make choices that would take into account the wellbeing of both the human and the nonhuman other. In promoting this perspective as early as 1962, Carson can and should be read as a proto-deep ecologist. Moreover, due to the central role that water played in the development of her proto-deep ecology, I refer to her project as one of deep hydrology.

Considering Carson a proto-deep ecologist is not merely speculative. The neologism was coined by, and the platform that term denotes was principally defined by, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess in the early 1970s, and on many occasions Naess cited Carson as one of his primary inspirations (Devall and Sessions 65; see also Clark 78). According to Naess, in his field-defining article "The Shallow and the Deep, Long-Range Ecology Movement," "deep ecology"

represents the principle that all living things possess intrinsic value and, therefore, deserve respect regardless of whether they offer any instrumental benefits to other forms of life, either human or nonhuman (95-100). “Shallow ecology,” by contrast, suggests less radical and less philosophical forms of environmentalism that seek only to preserve the planet’s resources for the enjoyment and sustenance of future generations of humans. In order to counter the anthropocentrism that is ubiquitous even in environmental movements, Naess proposes a theory of “biospherical egalitarianism” that extends the inherent right to life to all nonhuman forms of life (95-96). Naess sought to build upon the metaphysics of Spinoza, which he saw as an early version of Transcendentalism and pantheism, and he wanted to fuse these ideas with the more recent ecological work Rachel Carson presented in *Silent Spring*. In particular, Naess rejects atomistic individualism, which he believes results in humans’ presumption of both individual and species superiority, and instead he asserts that humans should inform their perception of the biosphere with relationalism, a theory of the interconnectedness of the global biospherical network. This relational perspective breaks down the barriers between the human ego and the environment, and ideally results in increased concern over the wellbeing of nonhuman forms of life.

In addition to Naess’s early essays, Bill Devall and George Sessions’s book, simply entitled *Deep Ecology* (1985), was “the first major book on the deep ecology movement by writers other than Naess,” and it “helped to introduce the concepts of the deep ecology movement to North America” (Drengson and Inoue xviii). Devall and Sessions rearticulate and extend Naess’s emphasis on the interconnectedness of all facets of the earth. In particular, they focus on breaking down what they consider false boundaries between the human and the natural world. Devall and Sessions ask, “What does it mean to be a unique human individual? How can

the individual self maintain and increase its uniqueness while also being an inseparable aspect of the whole system wherein there are no sharp breaks between self and the *other*?" (65). To answer these questions, they assert that "the deep ecology sense of self requires a further maturity and growth, an identification which goes beyond humanity to include the nonhuman world" (67). In order to attain this mature deep ecological sense of self and to cultivate the "whole person," they argue that the individual must become aware of the "'self-in-Self' where 'Self' stands for organic wholeness" (67). This all-inclusive awareness of "self" and "Self" ideally leads to the idea that "if we harm the rest of Nature then we are harming ourselves. There are no boundaries and everything is interrelated" (68). Devall and Sessions maintain, as does Naess in his later writings, that the development of the "ecological self" is important for human development because it enables individuals to situate themselves in their myriad contexts: "We may be said to be in, of and for Nature from our very beginning. Society and human relations are important, but our self is richer in its constitutive relations" (Naess, "Self-Realization" 14).⁴³

Deep ecologists propose that understanding ourselves within both the narrowest and broadest contexts of human and nonhuman communities will preclude the desire to create hierarchies of species and by extension hierarchies of human communities. Devall and Sessions argue that a habit of dominance has marked technocratic-industrial societies, which tend to assume that humans are isolated from the ecosystems in which they dwell and interact.

⁴³ For Naess, the "ecological self" represents an ontological approach to the environment, which he believes will ultimately inspire environmental activism in a way that appeals to ethics fail to accomplish: "Unhappily, the extensive moralizing within environmentalism has given the public the false impression that we primarily ask them to sacrifice, to show more responsibility, more concern, better morals. As I see it we need the immense variety of sources of joy opened through increased sensitivity toward the richness and diversity of life, landscapes of free Nature. We all can contribute to this individually, but it is also a question of politics, local and global. Part of the job stems from the consciousness of our intimate relation to something bigger than our ego, something which has endured through millions of years and is worth continued life for millions of years. The requisite care flows naturally if the 'self' is widened and deepened so that protection of free Nature is felt and conceived as protection of ourselves.

Academically speaking, what I suggest is the supremacy of environmental ontology and realism over environmental ethics as a means of invigorating the environmental movement in the years to come" ("Self-Realization" 26).

Furthermore, they claim that this notion of separateness and superiority is part of much larger and older cultural patterns: “For thousands of years, Western culture has become increasingly obsessed with the idea of *dominance*: with dominance of humans over nonhuman Nature, masculine over the feminine, wealthy and powerful over the poor, with the dominance of the West over non-Western cultures. Deep ecological consciousness allows us to see through these erroneous and dangerous illusions” (Devall and Sessions 65-66). This perception is perhaps the most radical and useful facet of the deep ecological platform. Not only can deep ecology encourage more sustainable relationships between humans and the environmental networks of which they are inextricable parts, but it can also enable people to see the interconnections and interdependencies among all varieties of human and nonhuman communities, and this understanding can lead to enhanced empathies that have the potential to affect both social and environmental justice.

Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle*

Connecting Kurt Vonnegut to these analyses of Rachel Carson, Arne Naess, and deep ecology yields new insights into Vonnegut’s novel *Cat’s Cradle* as well as a recognition of his role as a significant, if overlooked, writer of the fledgling American environmental movement of the early 1960s. At first glance, this interpretation of Vonnegut may seem anachronistic, given that Naess did not begin writing about deep ecology until 1973. However, this is precisely my point in claiming for Vonnegut an important role in the history of American environmental thinking. I contend that Vonnegut, like Carson, utilized some of the most cutting-edge knowledge about science and ecology in his fiction. Moreover, I propose that Vonnegut probably read *Silent Spring* and that it may have been a significant source for the ecological content as

well as the socio-cultural themes of *Cat's Cradle*.⁴⁴ I argue that Vonnegut can also be read as a proto-deep ecologist in that he explored complex notions of interconnected environmental networks and sought to extend these ideas to analyze human networks, and he did so a decade before Naess published his theories of deep ecology. Thus, while Naess may be considered the most prominent advocate of deep ecology, these radical advances in midcentury environmental thinking had pervasive cultural currency long before Naess, in part due to earlier writers such as Carson and Vonnegut.

Critics generally do not consider Kurt Vonnegut a “nature writer,” and his novels are not often considered “environmentally oriented,” to use Lawrence Buell’s phrase (7).⁴⁵ However, throughout his life, Vonnegut was often preoccupied with environmental concerns and increasingly in his work, particularly his nonfiction, he addressed the nation’s most pressing ecological issues (Morse 135). In his last book of nonfiction, a collection of short essays and speeches entitled *A Man Without a Country* (2005), Vonnegut refers repeatedly to the nation’s neglect of the environment (9, 42, 44-45, 70-71, 121-122, 137). In particular, he expresses concern over Americans’ disregard of long-term plans for environmental sustainability. Therefore, he laments the fact that Americans “are rapidly destroying the whole planet as a breathable, drinkable system for supporting life of any kind” (70-71), and he argues that Americans are neglecting to consider the depleted natural resources they are leaving for future generations: “I know of very few people who are dreaming of a world for their grandchildren” (70-71). Vonnegut even suggests that the planet itself is beginning to develop defense

⁴⁴ I have not found any evidence to suggest that Vonnegut read *Silent Spring* in its book form. However, he may have encountered it in its serialized form in *The New Yorker*. His familiarity with the magazine is evidenced by numerous references to it in Dan Wakefield’s recent collection of his letters (2012).

⁴⁵ See my introduction for a discussion of Buell’s definition of how to identify an “environmentally oriented” text.

mechanisms with which it will attempt to render humankind extinct: “I think the planet should get rid of us. We’re really awful animals... The good Earth—we could have saved it, but we were too damn cheap and lazy” (121-22).⁴⁶ Perhaps the most radical facet of Vonnegut’s environmental philosophy in *A Man Without a Country* is not that he thinks the earth will eradicate humankind, but rather that the “good Earth” *should* eradicate humankind.

Instead of being classified as an environmental writer, Vonnegut is much more often considered a Cold War writer. This interpretation is understandable given the events of his life and his views on war. Vonnegut entered the U.S. Army during World War II, and as an infantry scout he was captured at the Battle of the Bulge and imprisoned in Dresden. While there he survived the firebombing of Dresden, which was “the most horrific aerial assault of the European war and controversial to this day” (Klinkowitz 8). This single experience altered Vonnegut’s conception of modern warfare. For many years, he tried to write about his experience, but he could not bring himself to do so until the late 1960s when he wrote *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). In a speech in 1970 at Bennington College, Vonnegut explains the impact of his experience in Dresden and his interpretation of World War II more broadly:

I thought scientists were going to find out exactly how everything worked, and then make it work better... Scientific truth was going to make us *so* happy and comfortable. What actually happened when I was twenty-one was that we dropped scientific truth on Hiroshima. We killed everybody there, and I had just come back home from being a prisoner of war in Dresden, which I’d seen burned to the ground. And the world was just then learning how ghastly the German

⁴⁶ Vonnegut made very similar comments in an appearance on *The Daily Show* on September 13, 2005. This is available in the archived episodes on comedycentral.com.

extermination camps had been... I have been a consistent pessimist ever since, with a few exceptions. (qtd. in Freese 211-12)

In addition to being a self-professed pessimist about humans' use of technological advances, Vonnegut also became a committed pacifist, a position that Peter Freese argues is apparent in *Cat's Cradle*: "the novel represents the counter-culture's anti-war attitude; and in its contrast between Bokonon's call for indiscriminate love and Dr. Hoenikker's ice-nine it comes close to embodying the counter-culture's central slogan 'Make Love Not War'" (227).⁴⁷ Significantly, Vonnegut developed this anti-war stance long before the escalation of U.S. involvement in the conflict in Vietnam, and thus *Cat's Cradle* is preoccupied largely with the Cold War. Gregory D. Sumner says of the novel: "A rollicking burlesque of the Cold War, told in 127 bite-sized chapters, it was precisely in tune with the experimental freedom opening up in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis—as indispensable an artifact of that moment as Stanley Kubrick's cinematic black comedy, *Dr. Strangelove*" (81).

In addition to considering Vonnegut a Cold War writer, I contend that he should be considered an important environmental writer of the period. Due to the emerging ecological understanding of the interconnectedness of the biosphere and possibly after actually reading *Silent Spring*, Kurt Vonnegut cultivated *Cat's Cradle* (1963) as a cautionary parable about human interference in the natural world, thus converting Cold War atomic paranoia into a distinctly environmental anxiety. However, these two pervasive postwar concerns—the nuclear and the ecological—are not altogether unrelated. Both involve the same environmental and health risks, including fallout radiation, and both engender similar political and philosophical issues, such as whether ends justify means when the U.S. engages in either cultural or ecological

⁴⁷ Ice-nine, which I discuss at length below, is a substance that causes water to freeze at room temperature. This technology has apocalyptic effects in *Cat's Cradle*, because it freezes all of the earth's bodies of water and, as a result, effectively destroys life on the planet.

colonialism. The best example of the conflation of nuclear and environmental anxieties in Vonnegut's oeuvre is *Cat's Cradle*, in which he brings these two anxieties together by having the "father of the atom bomb" create "ice-nine," a weapon that proves far more destructive to life on earth than any nuclear technology. In *Cat's Cradle*, Vonnegut forces readers to confront humans' increasing tendency to deify science and technology as well as the possibility that humans can and possibly will destroy the planet.

The first-person narrator of *Cat's Cradle* begins the novel with the injunction: "Call me Jonah" (1). This clear allusion to the opening of Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851)—"Call me Ishmael"—is significant in linking Melville's ecocentric project to Vonnegut's own. Both Ishmael and Jonah are biblical characters closely associated with wilderness experiences. Ishmael and his half-brother Isaac are sons of Abraham. However, Abraham conceived Isaac with his wife Sarah, while he conceived Ishmael with Sarah's servant Hagar. Ishmael was, at least partially, raised in the wilderness after being cast out of his family due to the fact that he was not Sarah's biological son. Moreover, the biblical figure of Jonah was swallowed by a giant fish, commonly imagined as a whale—a detail that provides a clear link to Melville's Ishmael, who inversely chases a whale throughout the world's oceans. The Biblical Jonah was required by God to travel to Nineveh, the inhabitants of which had become irreversibly corrupt. Prior to being swallowed by the whale, Jonah was reluctant to do God's work—a quality that we also see in Vonnegut's protagonist, who says, "Jonah—John—if I had been a Sam, I would have been a Jonah still—not because I have been unlucky for others, but because somebody or something has compelled me to be certain places at certain times, without fail" (1). Jonah further explains this compulsion by referring to Bokononism, the religion that one of the characters in the novel (Bokonon himself) creates: "All things conspired to form one cosmic *vin-dit*, one mighty shove

into Bokononism, into the belief that God was running my life and that He had work for me to do. And, inwardly, I *sarooned*, which is to say that I acquiesced to the seeming demands of my *vin-dit*" (201-02). Therefore, Vonnegut's Jonah eventually acquiesces to God's will and determines to follow His commands. In addition, according to the biblical account of Jonah, the town of Nineveh is partially destroyed and its inhabitants, including the king, are left to sit among piles of ashes, an image conjured in the post-apocalyptic landscape in the concluding chapters of *Cat's Cradle*.⁴⁸ Robert T. Tally Jr. argues that "In pointing to *Moby-Dick*, as likely a candidate as ever was for the 'great American novel,' Vonnegut registers his own entry into the contest, but here it is also bound up in the laughable impossibility of the project" (1). Vonnegut's awareness of the "impossibility" of writing the "great American novel" is clear throughout *Cat's Cradle*—a narrative that provides an ongoing metafictional commentary on the difficulties, if not sheer impossibility, of writing such a book in the postwar context.⁴⁹

In the opening chapter of *Cat's Cradle*, Jonah explains that the events of the narrative began as he was working on a "factual" book called *The Day the World Ended*. Jonah is a graduate of Cornell University and a free-lance writer, who has decided to write a book that explores what prominent Americans were doing the day the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. He says, "My book is going to emphasize the *human* rather than

⁴⁸ Tally states that "The opening line of *Cat's Cradle*, Kurt Vonnegut's end-of-the-world masterpiece, unmistakably echoes that of *Moby-Dick*, Herman Melville's end-of-the-world masterpiece. Indeed, such echoes are audible elsewhere in *Cat's Cradle*, from the 'cetacean' Mount McCabe, which looks like a whale with a snapped harpoon protruding from it, to the great Ahab-like quarrel with God, humorously figured in Bokonon's thumb-nosing gesture at the novel's end" (1).

⁴⁹ This metafictional focus of *Cat's Cradle* has been read by some critics as evidence of Vonnegut's postmodernism. Although I do not consider Vonnegut's relationship to postmodernism in this chapter, I tend to agree with Tally's more balanced approach to this discussion. He argues, "Assiduously of his time, Vonnegut cannot escape his own postmodernity, with its pervasive fragmentarity and stubborn resistance to comprehensive meaning, but he remains a modernist who desires a form of completeness and semic stability that remains elusive. Indeed, Vonnegut is *untimely* insofar as he insists on a modernist aesthetic while trying (perhaps often failing) to make sense of a postmodern condition in which all of his work is situated. His postmodern iconography is therefore a powerfully modernist project" (4).

the *technical* side of the bomb” (7). Jonah uses the cosmological and absurdist terms of Bokononism, which he adopts throughout the narrative, to explain the role that his book played in catalyzing the most significant events of his life: “We Bokononists believe that humanity is organized into teams, teams that do God’s Will without ever discovering what they are doing. Such a team is called a *karass* by Bokonon, and the instrument, the *kan-kan*, that brought me into my own particular *karass* was the book I never finished, the book to be called *The Day the World Ended*” (2). Jonah’s book project leads him to interview Dr. Felix Hoenikker, who is commonly thought of as “the father of the atomic bomb” (6). As Jonah investigates this Nobel Prize-winning scientist, his work increasingly meditates on the use of military technologies.

In his article “Rescuing Science from Technocracy: *Cat’s Cradle* and the Play of the Apocalypse,” Daniel L. Zins states, “If living in a nuclear age places special responsibilities and burdens on all of us, our literary artists may bear an additional onus” (175). Vonnegut would undoubtedly concur with this argument, for Vonnegut believed wholeheartedly in the social utility of art, and he did not shrink from addressing contemporary politics in his fiction. Although Vonnegut was a writer who always managed to entertain his readers, he also seriously subscribed to the idea that writers have a responsibility to serve as “canaries in coal mines” for their particular culture: “You know, coal miners used to take birds down into the mines with them to detect gas before men got sick. The artists did that in the case of Vietnam. They chirped and keeled over. But it made no difference whatsoever. Nobody important cared. But I continue to think that artists—all artists—should be treasured as alarm systems” (*Wampeters* 238). This “canary-bird-in-the-coal-mine theory of the arts” is reflected throughout *Cat’s Cradle*. For example, in the first sentence of *The Books of Bokonon*, Bokonon states, “All of the true things I am about to tell you are shameless lies” (5). Jonah then says, “Anyone unable to understand how

a useful religion can be founded on lies will not understand this book either” (5-6). Thus, Vonnegut suggests that *Cat’s Cradle* is a book of lies (i.e. fictions), yet it is simultaneously full of truths. Kevin Alexander Boon argues that “Fifty years into the twenty-first century, when future scholars look back at Vonnegut’s work, they may not label him the voice of the postnuclear twentieth century, but they will certainly recognize him as its conscience” (ix). Perhaps the most prominent splinter vexing the collective American conscience of the postwar era was the past and likely future uses of horrendous military technologies, especially the atomic bomb, and, therefore, Vonnegut’s role as a canary in the coal mine was of utmost importance for this era.

Vonnegut utilizes the genre of science fiction to interrogate the ethical dilemmas that inevitably emerge as new technologies develop the capacities to annihilate vast human and environmental communities. Diana Newell has recently examined the impact of Hiroshima on the development of science fiction; she argues that “The US atomic bombing of Hiroshima in 1945 engendered in members of the Anglo-American science fiction communities a certain glow of self-congratulation for having brilliantly predicted a world-changing scientific development” (193). In particular, Newell explores the impact of Judith Merrill, who used “her position as a leading science fiction anthologist, reviewer, and critic to attempt to revolutionize science fiction as a powerful, creative genre: speculative fiction, or ‘SF’” (196). In the mid-1960s, Merrill argued that “science-fiction is not fiction about science, but fiction which endeavors to find the meaning in science and in the scientific-technological society we are constructing” (qtd. in Newell 196). Vonnegut similarly believes that science fiction has the unique ability to interrogate the meaning and uses of new technologies, and he contends that writers have an ethical obligation to explore these issues. Although Vonnegut says in *A Man Without a Country* that he is not comfortable

being labeled a science fiction writer (16), he does often write about technology, which he believes is necessary in contemporary fiction: “I think that novels that leave out technology misrepresent life as badly as Victorians misrepresented life by leaving out sex” (17).

Elsewhere in *A Man Without a Country*, Vonnegut identifies himself as “a Luddite”—“A person who hates newfangled contraptions” (55). However, his Ludditism derives from his suspicion not of science and technology in and of themselves; rather it results from his suspicion of how people tend to utilize new technologies, particularly those that are capable of disrupting or even ending the lives of vast numbers of people. Vonnegut’s perspective is similar to Rachel Carson’s in that he also seems to suspect that humans’ ethical systems are not growing as quickly as the new technologies they are producing. Therefore, *Cat’s Cradle* should not be interpreted as an overly simplistic screed against science. Rather, as Zins argues, “Vonnegut is warning of the apocalyptic consequences of the apotheosis of science and technology, of science and technology divorced from a sense of moral responsibility” (173). The tendency to separate morality from science is often regarded as an aim of technocracy,⁵⁰ which prompts Zins to ask, “Can science be rescued from a technocracy that blindly serves the nuclear state and exacerbates the militarism of the world?” (173). This is a question that many postwar novels sought to address, and it is one of the overarching concerns of *Cat’s Cradle*.

In the novel, Vonnegut’s narrator Jonah develops a meta-awareness of the significance of science fiction narratives. For example, Jonah says, “‘Write it all down,’ Bokonon tells us. He is really telling us, of course, how futile it is to write or read histories” (237). However, Bokonon

⁵⁰ For more information on the dearth of moral considerations in technocratic systems, see Joel Kovel’s *Against the State of Nuclear Terror* (1984) (214). My understanding of “technocracy” is similar to what T.J. Jackson Lears calls “techno-determinism”: “Whatever its variation in detail, the central story [of modernity] is always the same: technology churns out transformative and ultimately beneficent change; some will suffer in the transition to the New Era, but in the end all will be well. In any case there isn’t a damned thing we can do about it. Technology is in charge” (83).

and later Jonah seem to suggest that science fiction narratives are culturally significant because, unlike historical narratives, they point to the future instead of the past. Science fiction also enables individuals to face difficult or traumatic truths about the past, present, or future, and it empowers individuals to combat such truths indirectly, with a barrier that can make them more manageable. Furthermore, regarding apocalyptic science fiction, such narratives may help societies forestall actual apocalyptic scenarios in the future: “We create images of doom to avert doom” (Buell 295). M. Jimmie Killingsworth argues that literary “doom-and-disaster studies” that focus on environmental issues are particularly relevant to the present, because, unlike Cold War concerns, “the problems of environmental protection did not end with the fall of the Soviet Union and the consequent easing of the global nuclear threat” (363).

Vonnegut’s meta-awareness of science fiction narratives is clear in the chapter of *Cat’s Cradle* in which Dr. Hoenikker receives a novel in the mail from a man who is in prison: “The novel was about the end of the world in the year 2000, and the name of the book was *2000 A.D.* It told about how mad scientists made a terrific bomb that wiped out the whole world” (9). The prisoner sends the novel to Dr. Hoenikker because he wants assistance determining “what kind of explosives to put in the bomb” (10). Dr. Hoenikker, however, does not read the book; instead he merely takes the string that binds the manuscript and with it plays a game of cat’s cradle. Vonnegut suggests here that fiction often provides the necessary moral interrogations of technology that scientists may ignore. Throughout his five decades of writing, Vonnegut has consistently developed in his fiction this incredulosity toward scientific technology, and, according to Hartley S. Spratt, he has demonstrated again and again that “our world has become addicted to technology, a codependency that threatens to render Earth itself dysfunctional” (119).

Dr. Hoenikker's Nobel Prize acceptance speech further expresses Vonnegut's view that scientists often possess a child-like understanding of the larger ramifications of their own work. Hoenikker's speech, in its entirety, reads, "Ladies and Gentlemen. I stand before you now because I never stopped dawdling like an eight-year-old on a spring morning on his way to school. Anything can make me stop and look and wonder, and sometimes learn. I am a very happy man. Thank you" (11). Hoenikker's childlike persona is evident throughout *Cat's Cradle*, and several characters suggest that his immaturity gives him an aura of innocence. Other characters in the novel, though, are more critical of Hoenikker; Marvin Breed, for example, argues not that he possesses a childlike innocence but that he seems to be dead to the world: "Sometimes I wonder if he wasn't born dead. I never met a man who was less interested in the living. Sometimes I think that's the trouble with the world: to many people in high places who are stone-cold dead" (68). Hoenikker's inability to consider the ethical ramifications of the science he produces is most obvious on the day he and others test the first atomic bomb at Alamogordo, New Mexico. After the bomb is successfully detonated and "after it was a sure thing that America could wipe out a city with just one bomb," a colleague turns to Hoenikker and says, "Science has now known sin" (17). To this, Hoenikker simply says, "What is sin?"⁵¹

Hoenikker's children follow this model of ethically oblivious behavior as well. For example, the children also refuse to read the cautionary parts of the novel, *2000 A.D.* Instead they simply read and re-read a small portion of the text describing an orgy that occurs before the earth's final destruction. Moreover, this juvenile trend of behavior continues into the adulthoods of all the Hoenikker children. Jonah says that what Hoenikker's son Frank Jr. "wanted to do

⁵¹ Zins argues that "The question is purely rhetorical, and one that Felix undoubtedly has never asked before, or bothers to broach again. Abdicating his responsibility as a scientist—as a human being—by refusing to reflect on the moral implications of his activities, Felix contributes not only to the extirpation of two Japanese cities, but in bequeathing his final toy, ice-nine, to the world, he is also guilty of nothing less than omnicide" (173-174).

more than anything else [was] to do what his father had done: to receive honors and creature comforts while escaping human responsibilities” (224-25). Additionally, after the death of their father, the three Hoenikker children take pieces of ice-nine to use themselves, and in taking it, “there was no talk of morals” (251). Thus, Vonnegut suggests that a range of people neglect the moral dimensions of military technologies either because they are focused solely on technological development (Dr. Hoenikker) or because they are consumed with comparatively trivial aspects of the human experience (Hoenikker’s children). Moreover, Vonnegut depicts a clear connection between Dr. Hoenikker’s disregard of the larger ramifications of his work and his children’s disregard of “morals.” This transfer of apathy may be a result of Dr. Hoenikker’s failure to be a teacher for his children or to show any sign of love to them. Consequently, all three of the children end up obtaining affection in exchange for the secrets of Dr. Hoenikker’s military technologies. Thus, Zins argues, “We may prefer to blame our nuclear predicament on an unbridled technology, but Vonnegut suggests that it is our failure to be fully human that especially endangers us” (171).

Similar investigations of the uses and limits of science and technology continue throughout *Cat’s Cradle*. In fact, several characters other than Dr. Hoenikker so vehemently believe in science that they fail to cultivate a healthy skepticism toward scientific advancements, and thus they fail to consider the ethical ramifications of the technologies they create. This blind faith in science can most obviously be seen in Dr. Asa Breed, the vice-president in charge of the research laboratory of the General Forge and Foundry Company—the company for which Dr. Hoenikker develops his military technologies (20-21). As Jonah is doing research for his book, he talks to people at a local bar who report that Dr. Breed gave their high school commencement speech, in which, they say Dr. Breed indicated that “The trouble with the world was ... that

people were still superstitious instead of scientific. He said that if everybody would study science more, there wouldn't be all the trouble there was. He said science was going to discover the basic secret of life someday" (24). When he is interviewing Dr. Breed for his book, Jonah says, "Every question I asked implied that the creators of the atomic bomb had been criminal accessories to murder most foul" (39). According to Breed, however, the laboratory is one of the only places that does "pure research...men are paid to increase knowledge, to work toward no end but that" (41). In contrast, Breed's son represents the opposite relationship to science. During the conversation in the bar, the bartender explains to Jonah that Breed's son quit the Research Laboratory on the day the atomic bomb was dropped. According to the bartender, Dr. Breed's son believed that "anything a scientist worked on was sure to wind up as a weapon, one way or another" (26).⁵²

One prominent concern of *Cat's Cradle* that has not received much scholarly attention is its depiction of the ways in which advanced Cold War technologies were manipulating and, in many cases, destroying the environment. As these technologies determine the lives of individuals and the direction of large communities and nations, they tend to do so by exerting controls over the natural world, and these controls often produce ruinous results. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944), Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer assert, "In the most general sense of progressive thought, the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant" (qtd. in Tally 54). Contemporary scholars that offer environmental readings of *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* suggest that since the Enlightenment scientists have developed technologies that, although intended to control the natural world, have actually destroyed much of it. Building upon

⁵² This binary regarding faith in science can also be seen in the President of San Lorenzo, who says that "Science is the strongest thing there is" (146); antithetically, Bokonon is said to be "against science" (234).

Adorno and Horkheimer's work, Tally argues that "the very forces of humanistic progress led to the atrocities lately observed [in World War II]. That is, [Adorno and Horkheimer] reasoned, it wasn't that barbarism had briefly triumphed over civilization, but that civilization itself contained such elements of barbarism" (54). Furthermore, Tally contends that Vonnegut would concur with the ideas of Adorno and Horkheimer: "regardless of intent, the mastery of the world ... inevitably destroys the world" (55). In the atomic age, it became difficult to believe unquestioningly in the ability of science to create a world that would be better and safer, because technological advancements rendered global politics and ecologies ever more precarious.

In Vonnegut's sardonic imagination, each new technology is co-opted by national and international military forces. Throughout *Cat's Cradle*, the technology that Dr. Hoenikker cultivates is far worse than any nuclear technology, because it exerts an even more totalizing control over the natural world. In explaining to Jonah his attempts to control Hoenikker's research, Dr. Breed says, "If I actually supervised Felix ... then I'm ready now to take charge of volcanoes, the tides, and the migrations of birds and lemmings. The man was a force of nature no mortal could possibly control" (21). That Breed refers to Hoenikker as "a force of nature" may be surprising to readers given that Hoenikker's personality is so often demure and distracted. But Vonnegut seems to be suggesting not so much that Hoenikker is a force of nature in the typical use of the phrase but rather that his inventions make him a powerful force *upon* nature, in that he can alter natural systems in a way that had been inconceivable heretofore.

Ice-nine, which Dr. Hoenikker creates unbeknownst to anyone else at the General Forge and Foundry Company, represents the ultimate manifestation of humans' attempts to control the natural world. Dr. Hoenikker creates ice-nine because a Marine general commissions assistance in eliminating the mud that constantly hampers the movement of his troops (42). In Jonah's

interview, Dr. Breed is unaware that Hoenikker has successfully created ice-nine, but he admits that if it did exist it would freeze all the waters on earth because of their interconnected networks, and that, as a result, it would mean “the end of the world” (50):

[Jonah:] “If the streams flowing through the swamp froze as *ice-nine*, what about the rivers and lakes the streams fed?”

[Dr. Breed:] “They’d freeze. But there is no such thing as *ice-nine*.”

“And the oceans the frozen rivers fed?”

“They’d freeze, of course,” he snapped. “I supposed you’re going to rush to market with a sensational story about *ice-nine*. I tell you again, it does not exist!”

“And the springs feeding the frozen lakes and streams, and all the water underground feeding the springs?”

“They’d freeze, damn it!” he cried. “But if I had known that you were a member of the yellow press,” he said grandly, rising to his feet, “I wouldn’t have wasted a minute with you!”

“And the rain?”

“When it fell, it would freeze into hard little hob-nails of *ice-nine*—and that would be the end of the world! And the end of the interview, too! Good-bye!”

(49-50)

Ice-nine engenders the possibility of omnicide—thus destroying all life on earth. Moreover, its capacity to affect such totalizing destruction results from the fact that it targets water. Water, more than any other element in the biosphere, is so infinitely connected that its contamination is impossible to contain. Therefore, as Carson warns throughout *Silent Spring*, “It is not possible to

add pesticides to water anywhere without threatening the purity of water everywhere... And so, in a very real and frightening sense, pollution of the groundwater is pollution of water everywhere” (42). Regardless of whether Vonnegut’s knowledge of water-borne contagions came directly from Carson, Vonnegut clearly possesses a working understanding of the basic principles of ecology. In particular, he seems to comprehend that ecosystems are interconnected throughout the biosphere, and thus military technologies aimed at the environment may have ramifications throughout a global network. This ability to control the earth’s aquatic ecosystems yields a far more destructive power than any bombs yet developed. The fact that all of the water across the globe freezes and all life is in effect eradicated demonstrates Vonnegut’s early configuration of network theory. As was the case for many midcentury ecologists, Vonnegut understood environmental networks through his study of the interconnectedness of the biosphere’s waters. Moreover, Vonnegut’s notion of biospheric interconnectedness is similar to Carson’s in *Silent Spring*, particularly in their common hydrocentric emphases, and it is also similar to the deep-ecological understanding of interconnectedness that gained currency in environmental thinking in the mid-1970s. Thus, Vonnegut, like Carson, cultivates what I call deep hydrology.

Vonnegut’s idea for ice-nine, which became such an integral facet of *Cat’s Cradle*, originated with research being conducted at General Electric’s Research Laboratory in Schenectady, New York, where Vonnegut worked as a publicist for GE from 1947 to 1951. He secured the job through his brother Bernard Vonnegut, a scientist at GE “working on the concept of cloud seeding to produce rain” (Klinkowitz 8). Vonnegut bases the General Forge and Foundry in *Cat’s Cradle* upon his experience working for General Electric (Klinkowitz 43). Vonnegut’s position at GE “required him to interview scientists given license to play on the

frontiers of research, and the indifference he observed to the uses made of their discoveries, especially among those who came of age before World War II, gave him pause” (Sumner 82).

Bernard Vonnegut confirms that the actual idea for ice-nine derived from his time at GE:

I believe there is some basis for [the] idea that I played a part in giving Kurt the idea for ice-nine, for I can recall talking with him about it. It is possible that Kurt may also have had inspiration from Irving Langmuir at the General Electric Research Laboratory.

[The] suggestion that it was my idea to bomb the German glycerine plants with glycerine crystals is incorrect, for this was Langmuir’s idea and project. My talks about glycerine and nucleation phenomena with Langmuir undoubtedly played an important part in my coming up with the idea that there might be a stable form of crystalline water at some temperature above 0⁰C” (11).

While Vonnegut worked for GE, Irving Langmuir was researching the hypothesis that water could freeze at temperatures exceeding 0⁰C. Langmuir even explained this research to pioneering science fiction writer H.G. Wells, when he was touring the GE laboratories: “Wells never used the idea, so Vonnegut concluded, ‘Finders keepers—the idea is mine’” (Morse 63; see also Sumner 88). In a 2005 article in *Nature*, Srikanth Sastry explains that recent scientific advancements are making it possible to alter the temperature at which water freezes. Sastry notes that in recent test cases, scientists have actually succeeded in raising water’s freezing temperature, and he even states that such research could eventually yield a product similar to Vonnegut’s ice-nine (747).

Vonnegut applies to *Cat's Cradle* both his knowledge of midcentury ecology and the possibility of altering the temperature at which water changes from a liquid to a solid state. In doing so, Vonnegut creates a plausible catalyst for the apocalypse that occurs in the novel. The originary point of the contamination of the planet's waters and the apocalypse that ensues is a Caribbean island called the Republic of San Lorenzo. Jonah has come to this island because he "was assigned by a magazine to do a story" about a doctor who had come to set up a free hospital for the impoverished natives who dwell in the jungles there (84). Coincidentally—or "As it was supposed to happen," according to Bokonon—Dr. Hoenikker's three children have come to dwell on San Lorenzo, and Frank, his eldest son, has become "Minister of Science and Progress in the Republic of San Lorenzo" (80). Frank received this position from the island's dictator, Miguel "Papa" Monzano; in exchange, Frank has given Papa the ice-nine that he took from his father on the day of his death. When this knowledge is revealed, Newt asks Frank, "What did you tell him—that you had something better than the hydrogen bomb?" (241).

After Jonah has been in San Lorenzo for only a few days, Papa, who is terminally ill, commits suicide by swallowing a sliver of ice-nine. Jonah walks into Papa's room in his castle just after he ingests the lethal substance, and he finds that Papa has turned as hard as stone because the ice-nine has converted all the water in his body to ice. Jonah immediately understands the importance of this first use of ice-nine, and he retrieves the Hoenikker children so that they can account for their "monstrous criminality" by helping him figure out a way to stop the ice-nine from "ending life on earth" (239). However, even after ice-nine has been released, threatening to destroy the earth's ecosystems, the Hoenikker children refuse to take responsibility for the harm they have caused. Jonah says of Frank: "I could see him dissociating himself from the causes of the mess; identifying himself, with growing pride and energy, with

the purifiers, the world-savers, the cleaners-up” (242). Jonah suggests that this is the mindset of technicians, who are quick to fix problems, without evaluating the moral complexities of an issue. The Hoenikker children quickly recognize that the ice-nine must be prevented from spreading, and that they must “decontaminate the place” (250). To accomplish this, they plan to burn Papa’s body and to gather up any shards of ice-nine around the room and boil them so that they change back into liquid form—“good old, sweet old, honest old water” (246). As Jonah watches the Hoenikker children cleaning Papa’s room, he notes, “The brainless serenity of charwomen and janitors working late at night came over us. In a messy world we were at least making our little corner clean... And, childishly sure that they were making everything all right by cleaning up...” (246). Among the Hoenikker children, “there was no talk of morals” (251).

Before the burning of Papa’s body, a plane crashes into the base of the cliff on which Papa’s castle is built. The castle splits in half, and Papa’s frozen body falls down the cliff and into the sea below. In an instant, the earth’s interconnected hydrologies are frozen, and omnicide ensues. Jonah records his perception of the event:

I opened my eyes—and all the sea was *ice-nine*.

The moist green earth was a blue-white pearl.

The sky darkened. *Borasisi*, the sun, became a sickly yellow ball, tiny and cruel.

The sky was filled with worms. The worms were tornadoes. (261)

Therefore, in the literal blinking of an eye, all of the earth’s aquatic ecosystems are turned to ice, which instantaneously kills most life on earth and engenders weather-related phenomena, such as

tornadoes and the freezing of the troposphere and stratosphere that separate the earth from the sun.⁵³

Along with Mona, a young woman with whom he is infatuated, Jonah survives the initial freezing of the earth's waters by escaping into "a cozy bomb shelter" that Papa had constructed under the castle (262). Gregory D. Sumner notes that the bomb shelter has "all the amenities readers of the time would have expected for such a chamber... The image resonated for the children of duck-and-cover drills, as a satiric rendering of their darkest fears" (97). Throughout his time in the bomb shelter, Jonah remains aware that he will likely die as well: "This I assumed: tornadoes, strewing the poisonous blue-white frost of *ice-nine* everywhere, tore everyone and everything above ground to pieces. Anything that still lived would die soon enough of thirst—or hunger—or rage—or apathy" (264). When Jonah and Mona finally venture out of the bomb shelter, they realize that "the weather had become somewhat stabilized," although numerous tornadoes continue to ravage the earth (268). Surveying the environment in the wake of *ice-nine*, Jonah notices that "The earth was locked up tight. It was winter, now and forever," and Mona remarks, "Mother Earth—she isn't a very good mother any more" (269).

The health of the earth is a major concern for Bokononists, who ceremoniously vow that "we will love each other, yes,/ Yes, like we love our Mother Earth" (158). Because the earth has effectively perished, Mona, a devout Bokononist, kills herself by purposefully ingesting *ice-nine*; she does this after finding a large group of other Bokononists who have committed suicide in the same way after the Earth's contamination (274). Following Mona's death, Jonah stumbles around the frozen landscape before ultimately realizing that Frank, Newt, and an American couple have survived the *ice-nine* apocalypse as well. Ironically, these five survivors end up

⁵³ An apocalypse brought about by ice could be an allusion to Robert Frost's poem "Fire and Ice" (1920, 1923) (Cooley 412).

living a fairly contented life among the ruins of San Lorenzo; Jonah says that they constitute a “little society” that was like “the Swiss Family Robinson,” and that the whole ordeal had about it “a certain Walt Disney charm” (276). He even says that for the group “the living became very easy indeed”:

No plants or animals survived, it’s true. But *ice-nine* preserved pigs and cows and little deer and windrows of birds and berries until we were ready to thaw and cook them. Moreover, there were tons of canned goods to be had for the grubbing in the ruins of Bolivar. And we seemed to be the only people left on San Lorenzo.

Food was no problem, and neither were clothing or shelter, for the weather was uniformly dry and dead and hot. Our health was monotonously good.

Apparently all the germs were dead, too—or napping. (276-77)

Thus, ironically, after this apocalyptic scenario and after “No plants or animals survived,” the impromptu band of Swiss Family Robinson-esque survivors actually enjoy a pastoral idyll in which the landscape offers up all the food they can eat, and such bounty requires only minimal effort to obtain. Yet, undergirding this brief, humorous interlude is the idea that the earth’s aquatic ecosystems have been ruined and, consequently, the earth will not be able to sustain life, what little there is left of it, for much longer.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ On the topic of humor in the context of Cold War artistic productions, Buell argues “Nothing is more serious than nuclear holocaust, yet many have found it hard to take seriously even at the height of the Cold War... In the era of *Cat’s Cradle*, *Doctor Strangelove*, and *Star Wars* it is hard for apocalypticism to keep a straight face” (299-300). Moreover, John Cooley contends that in postmodern pastoral novels by writers such as Robert Coover, Kurt Vonnegut, and Richard Brautigan, there is “a pervasive self-consciousness, and deliberate, even clichéd use of figures and themes from the pastoral tradition. The tone of each is light, the most despairing images of pastoral death being offset by humor and giddy flights of imagination. Never before has pastoralism produced such devastating pictures of the death of Nature, and of the agrarian and wilderness ideals. Yet the tone, in each case, is almost cheerfully gothic” (419).

These later chapters of *Cat's Cradle* include several likely allusions to Rachel Carson's accounts of the effects of an apocalyptic scenario on insects and animals. In the first instance, Vonnegut demonstrates that spring in San Lorenzo will be as silent as the imagined "silent spring" in the "fable" that Carson creates to open her book. For example, Vonnegut refers to birds at two very significant points in the conclusion of *Cat's Cradle*. First, just as ice-nine is about to plunge into the sea, via Papa's corpse, a bird flying above Jonah begins to "cry," and Jonah believes that the bird is addressing him directly: "It seemed to be asking me what had happened: 'Pootee-phweet?' it asked" (260). The question—"Pootee-phweet?"—posed by this bird in *Cat's Cradle* is the same question posed by a bird in *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969) after the firebombing of Dresden. Molly Wallace argues that when Vonnegut finally was able to bring himself to write about his experience in Dresden, he dramatized the horror of the massacre and the war's "unspeakability by giving responsibility for speech to a bird, whose query also closes the book" (126). The narrator of *Slaughterhouse-Five* explains the significance of this bird in the narrative:

It is so short and jumbled and jangled, Sam, because there is nothing intelligent to say about a massacre. Everybody is supposed to be dead, to never say anything ever again. Everything is supposed to be very quiet after a massacre, and it always is, except for the birds.

And what do the birds say? All there is to say about a massacre, things like "Poo-tee-weet?" (19)

Vonnegut asserts the same notion of war's unspeakability in his nonfiction as well. In *A Man Without a Country*, he briskly notes, "Of course, another reason not to talk about war is that it's unspeakable" (20). Wallace argues that "In posing this searching if inarticulate question ["Poo-

tee-weet?"]], Vonnegut's imagined avian highlights the absurdity and senselessness of war by envisioning it from the outside. In the still and desolate aftermath, the bird speaks of the unspeakable, saying 'all there is to say,' which is to say essentially nothing" (126-27). Vonnegut had used this same device of allowing a bird to convey the unspeakability of war in *Cat's Cradle*. However, in this earlier iteration, he was imagining war between humans and the environment rather than simply between competing human communities.

The second reference to birds in the conclusion of *Cat's Cradle* occurs as the contamination of the world's waters results in a landscape devoid of birds. As Jonah and Mona walk through the frozen landscape of San Lorenzo, he begins to think about the cosmic implications of this apocalypse, and he imagines himself to be a child, wishing his father were present to explain the current state of the world: "If I had had my daddy beside me as Mona and I walked down the road from the palace, I would have had plenty of questions to ask as I clung to his hand. 'Daddy, why are all the trees broken? Daddy, why are all the birds dead? Daddy, what makes the sky so sick and wormy? Daddy, what makes the sea so hard and still?'" (271). This bird-less landscape may well be an allusion to Carson's *Silent Spring*, which had become "a household name" in American culture (Kroll 404, 412) by the time Vonnegut was completing *Cat's Cradle*. Moreover, Wallace argues that "Birds, speaking or silent, have long served as figures for chronicling the destructiveness of humankind... [B]irds have offered a kind of metaphorical barometer of environmental destruction, a set of figurative and literal indicator species for novelists, nature writers, and scientists alike" (127). The dearth of birds in the post-apocalyptic landscape at the end of *Cat's Cradle* functions in precisely this way, as it demonstrates that the irreparable destruction of the earth's hydrologies ultimately annihilates all life on the planet.

At the end of *Cat's Cradle*, Jonah also registers the destructive force of ice-nine by discussing two effects it had on insect communities. In the first instance, one of the survivors says, "One good thing anyway, no mosquitoes" (277). This, too, may be an allusion to *Silent Spring* and the controversy that was raging in 1963 over the use of DDT. One of the primary uses of DDT in residential communities was to control mosquito populations. Thus, Vonnegut highlights, as had Carson, the ways in which attempts to control the natural world can have results far more devastating than the initial issues being addressed. Ice-nine was originally intended to fix the problem of soldiers having to trek through mud but ultimately disrupted the entire biosphere; similarly, DDT was intended to control insect pests but ended up causing cancer, genetic mutation, and death in many animals and humans. In *Cat's Cradle*, when the character says that there are no longer mosquitoes, Jonah thinks, "Our adjustment became so satisfactory, so complacent, that no one marveled or protested" (277). This sense of comfort and complacency is precisely what both Carson and Vonnegut are seeking to combat. Both narratives require that readers interrogate the attitude that ends justify means, and this interrogation is as important in wars between humans and the environment as it is in wars between nations.

Ants also make a noteworthy appearance in the concluding chapters of *Cat's Cradle*. According to Jonah's account of this post-apocalyptic world, ants appear to be the only living creatures, other than the five human survivors, who have been able to sustain life after the release of ice-nine into the environment. To survive in this "waterless world" (270), the ants use their bodies to create a large ball around a grain of ice-nine. This tactic kills the innermost ants in the ball, but their effort produces enough heat to melt the grain of ice-nine, which gives the surviving ants water to drink, and they can also consume the dead ants (280). Frank is particularly fascinated by this behavior, and he repeatedly asks Jonah, "Who taught *them* how to make

water?” Frank also asserts that “people could learn from ants”; and the lesson that he appears most obsessed with is the idea that ants “co-op-er-ate” (280). This discussion of ants provides the novel with a note of optimism, for Vonnegut suggests that the natural world is resilient. As Carson demonstrated throughout *Silent Spring*, the natural world often creates new ways to regenerate itself, even when confronted with the worst contaminants ever manufactured by humans. Moreover, if creatures in the natural world are beginning to defy the odds and survive in such a contaminated environment, there appears to be a glimmer of hope for the survival of life on earth. This hope may even extend to humans if, as Frank points out, they ever figure out how to cooperate.

This ability to learn valuable lessons about human relationships from encounters with the environment is a significant facet of deep ecology that grows directly out of a particular understanding of ecology that emerged after World War II. Vonnegut demonstrates his knowledge of the interconnections between the earth’s ecosystems by depicting how one aquatic community can also devastate aquatic communities across the globe. This global environmental awareness was only just achieving scientific legitimacy during the two decades preceding *Cat’s Cradle*; yet, like Carson, Vonnegut uses this knowledge accurately, and advances it by proposing that the understanding of environmental networks should affect the understanding of human networks. The title image of *Cat’s Cradle* can itself be read as a network, in which all the points along the string are connected and disruptions anywhere will reverberate at all other points. This network in the novel is both environmental and human. The environmental network is represented by the earth’s interconnected hydrologies, and the human network is represented most clearly by the image of the *karass*, a group of people who accept their connections, while ignoring “national, institutional, occupational, familial, and class boundaries” (2-3). Vonnegut

echoes this point late in the novel when Jonah expresses the importance of avoiding a “false *karass*,” which Bokonon calls a *granfalloon*; Jonah says that examples of *granfalloons* are the “Communist party, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the General Electric Company, the International Order of Odd Fellows—and any nation, anytime, anywhere” (92). Newt misinterprets the meaning of the cat’s cradle, claiming that it is absurd because there is “*No damn cat, and no damn cradle*” (165-66).⁵⁵ But Newt, like his father before him, fails to see that the cat’s cradle signifies the social and environmental tenets of deep hydrology.

Vonnegut’s insistence on networks, both human and nonhuman, aligns him with the work of deep ecologists that emerged in the following decades. Moreover, network thinking likely assisted in generating the humanism with which Vonnegut would be associated increasingly throughout his life. Vonnegut’s conception of humanism is vast, extending beyond the boundaries of nations as well as beyond the human and into the natural world. *Cat’s Cradle* is a novel with an imperative environmental message. Echoing the message of Rachel Carson, Vonnegut suggests that in the not-too-distant future the world could quite literally end, and that in addition to the threat of a nuclear bomb, we must learn to fear technologies that threaten the delicate balance of ecological networks. Adopting a humanism that treats both the human and nonhuman world “as decently, as fairly, and as honorably as we can” (*A Man* 79), Vonnegut suggests, could lead to a healthier and more fulfilling world that acknowledges and embraces its infinite connections.

⁵⁵ This line became famous during the 1960s because it demonstrated the futility of looking for something that one knows is not present: “Perhaps without meaning to, Kurt Vonnegut had invented a rallying cry for the 1960s counterculture—‘No damn cat, and no damn cradle’—in the voice of the earnest and aggrieved Newt” (Sumner 94).

CHAPTER II

A Yearning for the Mud: Metafiction, Metafilm, and Exile in Robert Penn Warren's *Flood*

“This is the story of a river ...
Where it comes from, where it goes
What it has meant to us—
And what it has cost us.”

- Pare Lorentz, *The River* (1937)

The field of southern studies continues to foster the exponential growth of “the South,” as scholars seek to place the region in ever larger contexts, including the Americanized South, the hemispheric South, and the global South. The fact that the region has become inextricably linked with national and international networks of cultural and economic exchange necessitates broader contextualizations, and these scholarly efforts are expanding our critical understanding of the South as both a geographical space and a cultural production. At the same time, however, other contemporary scholars are usefully narrowing regional definitions and classifications. In the field of environmental studies, for example, scholars emphasize the reciprocal relationships among localized networks of landscapes and cultures. While ecocritics frequently gesture toward the global when considering the larger ramifications of what transpires at the local level, they often emphasize the micro rather than the macro level of systemic interactions between human and

ecological communities. In particular, theories of bioregionalism remap regions along the lines of specific ecosystems in order to explore the exchange between cultures and their specific geographical-ecological contexts. In literary and cultural studies, bioregionalism provides a comprehensive theoretical framework because it takes into account the socio-cultural contexts of regionalism as well as the scientific and environmental contexts of ecology.

Throughout Robert Penn Warren's career, the environmental philosophy that coalesced in his poetry, fiction, and nonfiction anticipates these contemporary theories of bioregionalism. Warren's own conception of both regionalism and proto-bioregionalism evolved from his lifelong interest in and interrogation of agrarianism. Once he had disavowed the many problematic facets of the Southern Agrarian platform (for example, its insistence on segregation, class hierarchies, theocracy, and Old South ideological paradigms and agricultural practices),⁵⁶ Warren was able to arrive at a worldview that is in many ways consistent with bioregionalism. Louis Rubin proposes that the Southern Agrarians were important, if unacknowledged, figures in the development of early twentieth-century American environmental thinking ("Introduction" xviii), because of their belief that the industrial homogenization of the natural world leads to the homogenization of culture, and it is precisely this bioregionalist perspective that Warren cultivates, knowingly or not, in several of his mid-to-late career works. Randy Hendricks argues that Warren is "an unacknowledged father of the branch of contemporary regionalist theory known as bioregionalism" (23); however, neither Hendricks nor any other scholar has endeavored to provide a substantive bioregionalist reading of Warren's work. In this chapter, I read Warren's critically neglected 1963 novel *Flood: A Romance of Our Time* through the lens of bioregionalism in order to understand more fully Warren's mid-career conception of the

⁵⁶ For more information on the etymology of "agrarianism" as well as examples of how the word is employed in contemporary contexts, see my essay "The Problematic History and Recent Cultural Appropriation of Southern Agrarianism" in *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*.

American South and his metafictional and metafilmic investigations of how best to capture the internal, psychic realities of southerners and the external material conditions of the South.

Flood was not well received by critics when it was published, and in subsequent generations it has been largely ignored by literary scholars, especially compared to the voluminous body of work on Warren's first novel *All the King's Men* (1949). Some critics argue that the sprawling, unwieldy plot of *Flood* and its numerous, enigmatic symbols suggest that idea and form in the novel are generally not harmonious (Guttenberg 165). Others contend that *Flood* demonstrates that in general Warren's fiction is, in the words of James Justus, "unwell-made" (262), and that his fictional powers diminished in his later novels. Despite such criticism, some of which he was undoubtedly aware of, Warren stated that he found *Flood*, *World Enough and Time*, and *All the King's Men* to be his most satisfying novels, and on several occasions Warren went so far as to say that *Flood* was the best novel he had ever written. In his biography of Warren, Joseph Blotner quotes enthusiastic remarks from letters Warren wrote just before the publication of the novel. In one, Warren states, "This is my best one... If it isn't I'll change my line of work. I mean this" (352); and in another letter, he says, "I trust that this is my best book...because it seemed to me that as I worked I was getting more of myself into it, involving more ratios of things that concern me" (353). This optimism had staying power, too; in an interview in 1969, Warren asserts, "That's the novel I'd have to rest my case on, though, for better or worse" (qtd. in Sale 83).

Warren's inspiration for *Flood* came largely from witnessing small towns and villages in the 1930s as they were flooded by the TVA. Warren says, "I've seen one or two flooded-out places in the TVA system in Tennessee. For years and years, I thought maybe somehow this was

an image, this kind of doomsday to a community. Then, arbitrarily, BANG, the community is gone. What happens to human relations in that context?" (qtd. in Sale 82). The haunting image of a once-lively town that was later entombed at the bottom of a lake remained with Warren for decades, and he planned the writing of *Flood* for more than twenty years (Walker 256). This considerable period of incubation, as well as the fact Warren considered *Flood* his best novel, suggests that the text may deserve more careful critical attention than it has yet received. Moreover, *Flood* necessitates more rigorous investigation by contemporary readers because of the significant autobiographical, regional, environmental, and artistic studies that the novel undertakes. Not only is *Flood* based on certain significant facets of Warren's own life, principally his status as an exile from the South, but it also examines two of Warren's most sustained philosophical and critical preoccupations: agrarianism and artistic formalism. In *Flood*, these two preoccupations are intimately linked in Warren's analysis of the interconnections among native cultural and natural communities.

Flood principally tells the story of its protagonist, Brad Tolliver. In the opening scene of the novel, which takes place in 1960, Brad returns to his hometown of Fiddlersburg, Tennessee, after an absence of nearly two decades. During these years, he has become estranged from his native community as well as from his few living family members. His return is precipitated not by a desire for reconciliation but rather because he has been hired by one of Hollywood's most prominent directors, Yasha Jones, to write a screenplay about Fiddlersburg, which is about to be flooded as part of a large-scale TVA dam project. Brad is a sought-after screenwriter, with seventeen writing credits and two Oscars (28). However, Yasha is ambivalent about Brad's reputation as a brilliant screenwriter; instead, he hires Brad because in 1935, while still an undergraduate, Brad wrote an earnest and candid collection of short stories about Fiddlersburg.

As Brad and Yasha conduct research for the film, they investigate the inhabitants and habitats of both the human and natural communities of Fiddlersburg. Desperate to finish before the town is flooded, they struggle to find a fitting narrative for the film, one that will capture the essence of these communities without romanticizing or commodifying them. Warren utilizes this struggle in order to explore his own vexed relationship with the South and the difficulty of discovering an artistic form that will approximate the material and cultural reality of Fiddlersburg and, more broadly, of the American South.

Flood is Warren's most sustained exploration of how the homogenization of the natural world leads to the homogenization of culture as well as how the homogenization of culture diminishes artist endeavors. Contemporary ecocritics often examine the cultural effects of what Timothy Clark calls "living in an overwhelmingly synthetic environment of simulacra" (67). Warren was similarly preoccupied, especially when discussing the South; for example, he says, "when I considered going back permanently to Tennessee to live... I discovered the world had changed; it would have been artificial. That is, the world I'd be going back to would not be the one I was remembering" (qtd. in Sale 81). The changes to his native Tennessee were both cultural and geographical, and Warren suggests that these two categories of change influence one another. In "Knowledge and the Image of Man"—an essay that functions as a manifesto of his philosophical and artistic worldview—Warren suggests that the human experience is a "continual and intimate interpenetration, an inevitable osmosis of being, which in the end does not deny, but affirms ... identity" (241). Thus, according to Warren, self-identity forms through a constant negotiation of temporal and spatial interconnections; this dominant theme in his fiction and poetry is strikingly similar to contemporary conceptions of bioregionalism.

Michael Kowalewski argues that “Bioregionalism emphasizes the fact that human behavior and ethical deliberation take place within the context of local communities, both human and biotic” (31). Thus, bioregionalists often use their position to counter notions of rootlessness and alienation that are prevalent in twentieth-century culture and literature. Influenced by deep ecology, bioregionalism seeks to quell anthropocentric perspectives by combating the notion that the environment lacks agency. Clark contends that bioregionalism is marked by a desire “to let the geographical, climatic and biological nature of region become once more a crucial agent in human identity and social organization” (131). Furthermore, because place is so intimately linked to the formation of identity and ethics, bioregionalists often argue for the conservation of the environment. For example, Neil Evernden states, “Ultimately, preservation of the non-human is a very personal crusade, a rejection of the homogenization of the world that threatens to diminish all, including the self. There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place” (103).

Bioregions are generally charted by examining particular ecosystems as well as the cultures to which those ecosystems have given rise. Therefore, the borders of bioregions are indistinct and fluid, defined not by abstract lines on maps but rather by local environments and ecosystems, which lack clear boundaries because they are inevitably interdependent and interrelated. The effort to define specific bioregions is often complicated by the fact that bioregions overlay and, in some cases, contradict more traditional notions of American regions (i.e. New England, the West, the South, etc.). The difference between the perspective of traditional regionalists and that of bioregionalists is that the former attend to socio-historical contexts while the latter focus on ecological contexts (Kowalewski 29-30). Bioregionalists tend to consider broad regional categorizations reductive for failing to take into account

environmental determinants. Instead, bioregionalists seek to connect cultures that are geographically disparate but ecologically (and therefore culturally) similar. Therefore, considering the bioregionalist conception of human and natural ecologies, a culture that is produced, for example, within a riverscape in Georgia may share more similarities with a riverscape in California than it does with a mountain culture in nearby north Georgia.

Bioregionalism has been criticized in recent years, principally because it runs the risk of engendering what Kowalewski calls a “neoprimitivist romanticization” of rural and natural spaces (33). More often, though, bioregionalist writers consciously avoid fetishizing the primitive and instead simply respond elegiacally to the degradation and homogenization of natural spaces. Moreover, Kowalewski argues convincingly for the value of the bioregionalist perspective in cultural and literary studies because it enables scholars to “picture specific localities as complex, multilayered palimpsests of geology, meteorology, history, myth, etymology, family genealogy, agricultural practice, storytelling, and regional folkways” (44-45). Bioregionalists such as Kowalewski believe that examining places as “multilayered palimpsests” of cultures and geographies can lead to a fuller understanding of the literature associated with those places. Thus, bioregionalism provides a fuller theoretical framework through which to examine texts and cultures because it takes into account the socio-cultural context of regionalism as well as the scientific and environmental context of ecology.

Warren’s conceptions of regionalism and proto-bioregionalism evolved from his lifelong interest in and interrogation of agrarianism. One crucial development of agrarian philosophy in the twentieth century was *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition*, the symposium published in 1930 by twelve self-proclaimed southerners, among whom were literary heavyweights Allen Tate, Donald Davidson, John Crowe Ransom, Andrew Lytle, Stark Young,

and, of course, Warren himself. This group's philosophy had coalesced in and around Vanderbilt University during the mid-1920s, a time when the South came under attack from much of the country for its provincialism and religious fundamentalism. This attack was catalyzed in part by the acerbic critiques of H. L. Mencken and exacerbated during the Scopes evolution trial of 1925 (Rubin, *The Wary Fugitives* 194; Duncan 35; Conkin 32; Singal 200).⁵⁷ The Agrarians responded to these criticisms by repudiating the relatively progressive ideologies they had shared while still called "The Fugitives" and then by adopting a more traditional worldview and a much more conservative political platform.

John Crowe Ransom, the symposium's principal organizer, ardently believed that the twelve essays in *I'll Take My Stand* cultivated a central unified argument. To stress this unity he drafted "A Statement of Principles" as an introduction to the book. After Ransom drafted the introduction, all twelve of the authors collaborated in editing it and ultimately all subscribed to its content. In its opening paragraph, they state, "All the articles bear in the same sense upon the book's title-subject: all tend to support a Southern way of life against what may be called the American or prevailing way; and all as much as agree that the best terms in which to represent the distinction are contained in the phrase, Agrarian *versus* Industrial" (xxxvii). The introduction then asserts that in an industrial society, people cannot attain a healthy relationship with nature, and that without a healthy relationship with nature, they cannot attain a healthy relationship with art, humanity, or God. Industrialism, the authors maintain, inevitably leads to conformity and standardization. Therefore, humans fundamentally function better under an agrarian, rather than

⁵⁷ In the case of *The State of Tennessee vs. John Thomas Scopes*, a high school teacher in Dayton, Tennessee, was charged with teaching evolution and disseminating ideas from Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. Scopes was eventually found guilty, because his teaching had violated the newly instituted Butler Act, which encouraged the teaching of divine creation and forbade the teaching of evolution in any state-funded institution. Writers and journalists such as H.L. Mencken attended the trial and wrote scathing articles about the ignorance and fundamentalism of the rural South.

an industrial, social system, and the Vanderbilt Agrarians propagate as a model the Old South, where, they believe, the “life aesthetic” was successfully realized.

Vanderbilt agrarianism has long been denigrated because of its support of segregation, its codification of class hierarchies, its economic naïveté and impracticality, and its infeasible dedication to a return not just to Old South political paradigms (Karanikas 66) but also to a wholly pre-modern and even prelapsarian utopian ideal (Duncan 178). In the introduction to a new edition of *I'll Take My Stand* in 1977, Louis D. Rubin Jr. grapples with whether the book is still relevant despite the fact that it failed in its objectives both to halt industrialization in the South and to retain a “Southern tradition.” Rubin argues that the Agrarians were not economists or political scientists and, therefore, did not provide any practical social programs; instead, they were humanists, and *I'll Take My Stand*, therefore, is “the vision of poets,” who are chiefly concerned with “the erosion of the quality of individual life by the forces of industrialization and uncritical worship of material progress as an end in itself” (“Introduction” xiv). Furthermore, Rubin notes that the Southern Agrarians were early harbingers of the environmental movement that emerged in America during the 1960s and 1970s (xviii).

Warren’s own contribution to *I'll Take My Stand*, an essay entitled “The Briar Patch,” stands both then and now among the most controversial elements of the book. In this essay, Warren argues that African Americans should receive separate but equal treatment in the workplace as well as in all other aspects of daily life. Considering himself a “gradualist” (Walker 34), Warren fundamentally believed that African Americans deserved equal rights, but he argued that equality would take time to achieve. As a result, he made assertions similar to those of Booker T. Washington, proposing that African Americans would benefit most from vocational education which would enable them to achieve a better quality of life, especially if they were

guaranteed equal rights and equal pay (Blotner 106). Hugh Ruppersburg argues that while Warren's essay is patronizing and paternalistic, it demonstrates "surprisingly broad-minded attitudes for the time and place of its publication" (30). Donald Davidson was particularly vocal about his desire to reject "The Briar Patch" from inclusion in *I'll Take My Stand*, fearing that their readership would be put off by the essay's "progressive' implications"; he even doubted "whether RED ACTUALLY WROTE THIS ESSAY!" (qtd. in Blotner 112-3). Allan Tate, generally considered the most progressive of the Agrarians, stated that while he admired the essay he deplored its "sociological taint."

Warren later revealed that he had always been uncomfortable with the task of writing the "segregation essay" for *I'll Take My Stand* (Blotner 105-06), and in the decades following its publication, Warren repeatedly repudiated the racism and paternalism in "The Briar Patch" (Blotner 113). Moreover, according to Ruppersburg, Warren disavowed several of the other limiting aspects of *I'll Take My Stand*, including the fact that the essays were largely "from one perspective, reactionary, theocratic, racist, elitist, neo-Confederate, and unrealistic" (170). Nonetheless, Ruppersburg contends that Warren remained an Agrarian throughout his life and that the core values of his agrarianism changed very little throughout his life: "Agrarianism is the fundamental philosophical stance of Warren's career, the essential premise on which his American explorations have rested, including his eloquent studies of the civil rights movement" (30). Warren's interest in a more far-reaching conception of agrarianism is evident even in "The Briar Patch." In addition to his plea for equal (but separate) rights for African Americans, Warren's essay more broadly argues for the central tenets of Southern Agrarianism: "It expresses skepticism of urban life and industrialism, forces which to the agrarian mind are indifferent to the humanity of the individual, forces which depersonalize and dehumanize. They are the forces

of technology, the defining element of the modern world” (Ruppersburg 34). Warren continued to investigate these same issues throughout his career, and he increasingly conceived of agrarianism as a theory that transcended the South and thus should be national and global rather than merely regional.

Once shed of the limiting and problematic facets of the Southern Agrarian platform, Warren was able to arrive at a worldview that is surprisingly consistent with bioregionalism. Furthermore, bioregionalism is also consistent with contemporary definitions of “neo-agrarianism.” The fact that, as Rubin notes, the Southern Agrarians were early harbingers of American environmentalism may explain why the word “agrarianism” has seen an upsurge in the contemporary lexicons of scholars and activists working in the fields of environmental, agricultural, and food studies. Agrarianism—or, as it is sometimes called, “neo-agrarianism”—has become synonymous in recent years with various environmental theories, particularly systems of sustainable and organic agriculture. In the introduction to the anthology *The Essential Agrarian Reader: The Future of Culture, Community, and the Land* (2003), Norman Wirzba argues that “new” agrarianism is a “compelling and coherent alternative to the modern industrial/technological/economic paradigm. It is not a throwback to a never-realized pastoral arcadia, nor is it a caricatured, Luddite-inspired refusal to face the future” (4). Therefore, agrarianism is not merely a way of accomplishing positive stewardship of the earth’s resources but also, according to Wirzba, “a comprehensive worldview that holds together in a synoptic vision the health of land *and* culture” (5). This worldview, which for good or ill Wirzba insists on calling agrarianism, suggests that materialistic consumerism contributes to the exploitation and eventual annihilation of the earth’s resources and ecosystems. The solution, Wirzba

contends, is to live within local economies, which close the gap between sites of production and sites of consumption (7-8).

The most significant link between Southern Agrarianism and contemporary “agrarians” is Wendell Berry, who, after a forty-year career as a writer and activist, has emerged in the last decade as a significant source of inspiration for the newest generation of environmentalists.⁵⁸ Berry first read *I’ll Take My Stand* as an undergraduate at the University of Kentucky in the early 1950s, when his composition teacher told him that an essay he had written was “agrarian” and referred him to the manifesto. During the next few years, Berry read parts of *I’ll Take My Stand*, and he has stated that over time his “debt to it has increased” (“Imagination in Place” 74-75). In an essay from 1999, “Still Standing,” a title that alludes directly to *I’ll Take My Stand*, Berry claims that he has read the Southern Agrarians’ “Statement of Principles” many times, and he defends its importance, saying: “I know of no criticism of industrial assumptions that can equal it in clarity, economy, and eloquence” (*Citizenship Papers* 155). While Berry admits that *I’ll Take My Stand* is not “beyond criticism” and acknowledges its racism, particularly Davidson’s, he refuses to disregard the positive facets of the book. Instead, Berry attempts to absolve the “racist-by-association” stigma by arguing—rather unconvincingly, I think—that the same claim can be made of many important works such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bible. In the conclusion of “Still Standing,” Berry asserts that “hundreds of organizations, large and small ... are working regionally or locally for land conservation, better farming practices, community preservation, local marketing of food and other farm products, preservation

⁵⁸ For example, in the introduction to Berry’s recent compilation of non-fiction, *Bringing It to the Table: On Farming and Food* (2009), Michael Pollan admits that reading Berry’s work has been “a deeply humbling experience” because the current national and international debates concerning food quality and agricultural sustainability began in the 1970s largely in response to Berry’s work. Pollan says, “[T]o read the essays in this sparkling anthology, many of them dating back to the 1970s and 1980s, is to realize just how little of what we are saying and hearing today Wendell Berry hasn’t already said, bracingly, before” (X).

of agricultural breeds and varieties, better standards of health, and so on” (163). He contends that these organizations are actually working to disseminate a distinctly agrarian (i.e. Southern Agrarian) vision of the nation’s culture and agriculture. He concludes, “Several of The Twelve Southerners, were they alive today, would agree, and would be pleased” (163).

In “The Uses of Prophecy,” David W. Orr examines the uses and limits of the work of Wendell Berry, whom he calls “the preeminent agrarian” (171). Orr candidly acknowledges many of the counterarguments to Berry’s philosophy and more broadly to (neo-)agrarianism. For example, he notes that critics argue that this philosophy grows out of a nostalgia for a bygone era or for a cultural and agricultural system that never truly existed. He also notes that it is overly romantic and naïve to assume that farming communities in the past were able to attain an ideal balance between land and culture (172).⁵⁹ Despite the deep-seated pastoral fantasies associated with agrarian ideals, agrarian communities have often not lived in harmony with the natural world or with other human communities. In reality, agrarian communities have been responsible for vast ecological devastation since long before the large-scale industrialization of agriculture; for example, the Dust Bowl debacle of the 1930s was a direct result of short-sighted agricultural malpractices. Worse, agrarian communities have been guilty of social injustice, such as stealing land from native and marginalized peoples, and imposing oppressive conditions upon laborers. Agrarian cultures have also tended to be masculinist cultures, a power dynamic that has usually been buttressed by subjugating racial minorities as well as women and children. Moreover, the insularity and even provinciality of these communities has frequently inhibited social diversity.

⁵⁹ Critics also maintain that the small-scale farms endorsed by people like Berry would be woefully inadequate in providing sustenance for a rapidly growing world population. Feeding a world population may require industrialized modes of agriculture, including large-scale farms, monocultures, and chemical pesticides and herbicides. Therefore, corporations like ADM and ConAgra may be needed in the future to feed booming populations. Some environmentalists even argue in favor of technology-intensive food production because it enables farmers to grow more food on less land, thus preserving wilderness spaces and ensuring a cleaner and healthier environment (Orr 172).

Despite this litany of objections to agrarianism, Orr maintains that the platform does possess some lasting value; for instance, he says “Berry’s great achievement, I believe, is to describe eloquently and in great detail how our connections to soil, food, and agriculture extend through virtually everything else. He’s given us a grounded philosophy of the wholeness of things with the admonition to ‘solve for pattern’” (184). This sense of interrelatedness, however, is not always indicative of (neo-)agrarian platforms, which tend to be more utilitarian and less theoretical than bioregionalism. Although (neo-)agrarianism can be manipulated into the realm of the theoretical and out of the realm of instrumental agricultural studies, as Wirzba has attempted to do, it is often not philosophically engaged. Bioregionalism, by contrast, takes as its model deep ecological thinking and, as a result, considers more seriously and more rigorously the interrelatedness of culture and the environment.

Therefore, if regionalism is anachronistic (because of its reductive understanding of vast socio-historical trends in America) and if agrarianism is problematic (because of its racist and masculinist baggage) and theoretically limiting (because of its tendency toward utilitarianism), then contemporary bioregionalism emerges as a synthesis of the best qualities of regionalism and agrarianism without being encumbered by their more contentious elements. This is precisely the type of bioregionalism that Warren investigates in *Flood*. Thus, Warren, a life-long agrarian, may be more fittingly labeled a bioregionalist. Warren analyzes this bioregionalist perspective by focusing on the literal and metaphorical significance of floods in the lives of Fiddlersburg’s dispossessed citizens. In *Flood*, as well as *Meet Me in the Green Glen* (1971), Warren highlights the ways in which the industrial initiatives of the TVA displaced thousands of citizens, dismantled agrarian traditions and occupations, and altered irrevocably the landscapes of the American South. However, for Warren, such TVA flood projects did not solely yield negative

results, such as the obliteration of cultures and ecologies. In fact, as I will demonstrate, Warren largely supported the work of the TVA, particularly in enclaves of the South that were mired in insular, regressive politics. Yet, Warren utilized the symbol of the TVA flood to represent larger trends of displacement and homelessness as well as the cultural and ecological homogenization that he experienced in his own life and that he witnessed more broadly in American culture.

During the New Deal era, flood projects, man-made lakes, and hydroelectric plants were used both literally and symbolically to bring light to a South that many Americans still felt was a benighted region suffering from economic perils and social pathologies. In *The Nation's Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism* (2006), Leigh Anne Duck argues that in this period many people from both inside and outside the South believed that the region “existed in a distinct and isolated time, comprising one of many spaces left behind in the march of capitalist modernity” (178). David Lilienthal, director of the TVA from 1933 to 1946, says that during the early days of the TVA many Americans imagined the South to be one long “tobacco road” (qtd. in Spears). Similarly, Daniel Klingensmith argues that the nation viewed the Tennessee Valley as being provincial, especially after the Scopes evolution trial of 1925. Thus, the TVA fulfilled a hope of bringing “it (in the liberal discourse of modernity) fully into civilization” (Klingensmith 280). In the 1937 TVA propaganda film *The River*, Pare Lorentz argues that hydroelectric plants provide “power for the farmers of the valley cut off from the advantages of urban life, power for the villages and cities and factories in the valley ... power to make a new Tennessee Valley for a new generation.” For the Tennessee Valley, this “industrialization of rivers” led to a partial dismantling of southern agriculture and replacing it with an accelerated industrial revolution (Eva Jakobsson, qtd. in Turpin 40).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ The homogenizing force of this accelerated industrialization was exacerbated by TVA Chairman Arthur Morgan's efforts at social engineering. While most of these programs' benefits (such as electricity, health education, and

Lorentz made two important documentaries for the Roosevelt administration—*The Plow that Broke the Plains* (1936) and *The River* (1938)—both of which were deeply invested in examining the ecological degradation of the nation: “The Lorentz films, which won popular and critical acclaim, had few successors that so bluntly engaged the ecological issues facing the West” (John Shelton Lawrence 22). After writing laudatory articles about Roosevelt’s administration and after publishing a pictorial account of Roosevelt in the early to mid 1930s, Lorentz carried favor with the administration and, consequently, was awarded funding to make *The Plow* (23). The documentary is based largely on the effects of The Homestead Act of 1862, which gave 160 acres to anyone who could cultivate the land and live off of it for five years. The Homestead Act resulted in more than 80 million acres being distributed amongst 600,000 settlers (23). Because these lands were overworked and over-plowed, they were exposed to devastating droughts without the indigenous grasses to hold the soil in place. As a result, the topsoil in the area was carried away by the winds in periods of drought and washed away during periods of great precipitation. The ensuing desertification led directly to the Dust Bowl phenomenon of the 1920s and 30s, which Lorentz captured in *The Plow*. The Roosevelt administration then used the film to illustrate the ways in which the government could rectify agricultural and environmental problems. Lorentz’s second documentary, *The River*, was also funded by the Department of Agriculture, and it examined the issues of floods and erosion in the entire Mississippi River basin, which includes the both the Missouri River system in the West and the Ohio River system in the East. In *The River*, Lorentz’s narrator places the blame for 1930s ecological disasters squarely on the shoulders of the collective American “we”: “Ideologically, the film lacked a

literacy) far outweighed the drawbacks, it is important to note that Morgan’s policies had a tremendous impact on the culture of the valley. Additionally, he was consistently accused of using the inhabitants of the valley as guinea pigs in his social experiments (Fitzpatrick). Dwight Eisenhower even accused the TVA of “creeping socialism” (Spears).

Marxist-framed ‘greedy capitalist’ that caused the suffering of the laboring poor. And as might be expected from an official New Deal film, salvation would come through the benign agency of government” (Lawrence 27).

Because of the TVA’s constant emphasis on industrialization and because of the displacement of many of the region’s farmers,⁶¹ these projects brought to the fore of American consciousness the lengthy debate, beginning with Thomas Jefferson and running through the Southern Agrarians, over whether the region and the nation should be an agrarian or an industrial society. However, the TVA did not advocate for the complete eradication of agriculture in the region in favor of industry. In some significant ways, the TVA supported agriculture, because officials knew that in order to make a large impact in the region it would have to invest not only in water management but also in farming. For example, during the 1930s, 23,000 farmers signed up to be “TVA test demonstration farmers,” and their farms essentially became test laboratories for experimental agricultural techniques, such as contour plowing, diversifying and rotating crops, and using phosphate fertilizers. As a result of the implementation of these new techniques and technologies, crop production and output increased by nearly 100%, despite the fact that half of the valley’s farmland had been flooded for reservoirs (Fitzpatrick). Eventually, though, the TVA promoted a heavily mechanized and industrialized brand of agriculture, which was vastly different from the small-scale subsistence agriculture practiced in the valley and touted by certain Southern Agrarians, most notably Andrew Lytle. Consequently, many farmers of the region feared not only the industrialization of the region but also the industrialization of agriculture itself.

⁶¹ The projects displaced 125,480 residents in the valley, most in the 1930s and 40s, and resulted in the flooding of more than 300,000 acres of farmland (Klingensmith 37-9).

Despite the apparent chasm between the agrarian ideal and the industrial ideal espoused by the TVA, Edward Shapiro argues that while the Agrarians decried the “imperialistic and exploitative character of large-scale industrialization” (795), most of them, with the exception of Davidson, supported the TVA. In particular, they believed that the TVA would enable the South to industrialize slowly and in rural locales without the “urbanization, political centralization, and proliterianization which had occurred in the North” (799). Therefore, most of the Agrarians, including Warren, viewed the TVA as the best possible option given the inevitability of industrialization. Despite this support, though, Warren uses *Flood* to work through acute anxieties regarding the imminent cultural and environmental homogenization that industrialization inevitably engenders.

In the introduction to *I'll Take My Stand*, the Twelve Southerners contend that “nature industrialized, transformed into cities and artificial habitations, manufactured into commodities, is no longer nature but a highly simplified picture of nature. We receive the illusion of having power over nature as something mysterious and contingent” (xlii). As I have suggested, this anxiety over the homogenization of the natural world is much closer to a bioregional than a regional perspective. Like bioregionalists, the Agrarians believe that highly sanitized and homogenized environments catalyze detrimental impacts on culture. Specifically, “nature industrialized” damages both the production and consumption of art; the Agrarians state, “Art depends, in general, like religion, on a right attitude to nature; and in particular on a free and disinterested observation of nature that occurs only in leisure. Neither the creation nor the understanding of works of art is possible in an industrial age except by some local and unlikely suspension of the industrial drive” (xliii).

Warren's interest in such simulacracic environments as well as his investigation of humans' manipulation of water is apparent in the opening scene of *Flood*, in which Brad returns from California to Fiddlersburg. Just outside of town, Brad encounters a new motel called The Seven Dwarves. In the "landscape of artifice" (Guttenberg 120) surrounding The Seven Dwarves, Brad notices a stream that runs through the middle of the motel's tacky roadside props: "The creek was there, but it flowed decorously between two banks where stones were mortised into the earth," and along the stream there are statues everywhere of concrete frogs, dwarves, gnomes, and brownies. The stream by The Seven Dwarfs disturbs Brad, because, according to Arthur Mizener, "it is unavoidably real. In this way his attempt to believe that nothing matters is constantly being defeated, but he does his best to use even his awareness of the reality of the world to sustain his hope that it is fake" (55-56). In this scene, the stream is so "unavoidably real" for Brad precisely because of its placement in the middle of this artificial landscape. Throughout *Flood*, water functions in precisely this manner—to bring characters back in touch with reality. However, at the same time, the stream has been altered in that it now flows between banks that are clearly man-made. This manipulation of a hydrological system serves as a microcosm for Warren's larger investigation of similar efforts involving the TVA. Therefore, the fact that the stream's artificiality disturbs Brad adumbrates the narrative that follows, in which the TVA displaces an agrarian community and effectively destroys an entire ecosystem in order to facilitate the industrialization of the area.

The Seven Dwarves Motel comes to represent to Brad a new Tennessee and, more broadly, a new South. After picking Yasha up at the airport, Brad drives him to Fiddlersburg to begin their work on the film's screenplay. When they pass The Seven Dwarves Motel, Brad remarks, "It is the new Tennessee... I know it may not strike you as much, you being fresh from

the space-age vulgarities and Disneyland fantasia of L.A., but this is the best a backward state can do, and as such, is not to be scorned. You have to begin somewhere. And you will admit that this is a step in the right direction. America, I love you” (36). He then sarcastically says that his service in World War II ensured that such “vulgarities” could be created in America’s postwar economic boom. In these passages, Brad criticizes America at large for its crass commercialism, but he more specifically criticizes Tennessee for homogenizing to what he perceives as being a ridiculous national ideal. Brad contends that the “progress” that has been made is not only asinine but also threatening to the unique culture that may otherwise have existed in the state and region. Thus, it is with great irony that Brad, thinking of his military service, remarks, “And now I know that I have not lived in vain” (36).

In the following pages, Brad connects the TVA specifically to the theme of steamrolling unique aspects of American culture on behalf of a homogenizing, profit-driven mentality. He says,

Yes ... whenever they put in one of these big river projects the whole new lake for seventy-five miles gets cluttered with docks for spun-glass speedboats and Chris-Craft cruisers and guys with Hawaiian batik shirts... I can see it now. As Fiddlesburg, with its wealth of Southern tradition, unassuming charm, homely virtue, and pellagra, sinks forevermore beneath the wave, the Seven Dwarfs Motel will rise in spray, glimmering like a dream. It will rise like the vision of the palace of Fata Morgana... (38)

However, if The Seven Dwarves represents a “backward state” (and by implication a backward region) attempting to imitate national vulgarities, Brad does not romanticize Fiddlersburg and its antiquated culture; instead, he says, “But in a more serious vein, to tell you something about

Fiddlersburg, you ought to see River Street. It got froze long before the last steamboat lifted plank” (38). Fiddlersburg, which is epitomized by its antebellum downtown and specifically River Street, has largely resisted the artificiality of postwar America, but in turn it has become a “frozen” culture. Both Brad and his sister Maggie concur that this stagnation is prominent in Fiddlersburg but not in Nashville. While Fiddlersburg refused to change and thus progress after the Civil War, Nashville has attempted to parasitize its perceived cultural superiors, a desire which can be seen in Nashville’s replica of the Parthenon (23). Brad says that “Nashville has always aspired to be nothing more or less than a shining middle-bracket example of the Great American Middle Class. It aspires to be the Kansas City of the upper Buttermilk Belt... The slogan ... of the Junior Chamber of Commerce of Nashville, Tennessee, is ‘When Better Bourgeois Are Built Nashville Will Build Them’” (47). Thus, Brad disapproves of each trajectory of modern southern culture: the stagnant backwardness, represented by Fiddlersburg, *and* the simulacric pop culture, represented by Nashville and The Seven Dwarves Motel.

This binary of backwardness versus progress is an integral facet of Warren’s exploration of agrarianism and industrialization. Some critics of *Flood* have disparaged the book for simply pitting agrarianism against industrialization; however, this reading of the novel is reductive. Madison Jones’s novel *A Buried Land*—another TVA narrative that was, like *Flood*, also completed in 1963—is much more heavy-handed in its presentation of the agrarian/industrial binary.⁶² Jones himself was steeped in the teachings of the Southern Agrarians, having studied with Donald Davidson at Vanderbilt and later with Andrew Lytle at the University of Florida. Thus, it may come as no surprise that the plot of Jones’s novel serves as a frame upon which he can build a dialogue between agrarianism and industrialization. This binary is so reductively

⁶² For a comparative analysis of *Flood* and *A Buried Land*, see John T. Hiers’s “Buried Graveyards: Warren’s *Flood* and Jones’ *A Buried Land*” (1975).

configured in *A Buried Land* that Jones creates characters who are more like mouthpieces for particular ideologies than actual dynamic believable people. The novel's protagonist Percy Youngblood represents the industrialist position and his father Tracy represents the agrarian position. This calculated articulation of these two conflicting platforms is clear in this brief dialogue between Percy and Tracy:

“But it will help the county.” Here, for just an instant, his eyes met his father's. He could hear that tone getting clearer. “It's just the valleys that get flooded. This is a poor county, and it'll help: it'll bring industry in so everybody can have a decent living.”

“Industry,” his father said with contempt. “You ever seen any industry? Have you? I have. Stink, and people swarming in from God knows where that don't know a thing but their name. Living like a warren of rabbits and not thinking of a thing but their bellies. Is that—”

“It wouldn't be like that.”

“Is that a decent living? Ain't we got a decent living here, in this house?”

“But look how many people don't have. Look at the Bushnells. That little hut, living like hogs. Can't read or write... They [in the TVA] are just trying to help us all. We're like we were fifty years ago in this county, like a pocket. The rest of the world is changing fast, and we've got to change with it or rot.” (26-27)

I quote this lengthy passage from *A Buried Land* because it indicates Jones's tendency to represent the polarization of opinion that many TVA initiatives triggered. Throughout the novel, Jones depicts Percy as naively believing the TVA's propaganda about the progress of the South, while Tracy argues that the psychological and spiritual disorders of midcentury America are a

direct result of the dismantling of agrarian cultures in favor of capitalist industrialization. Moreover, the narrative leaves no ambiguity about the novel's intended message: Percy finally learns that the deterioration of traditional agrarian lifestyles results in the almost totalizing destruction of the ostensibly exceptional traditions and folkways of the American South.

Elia Kazan's 1960 film *Wild River*⁶³ similarly pits agrarianism and industrialization against one another. However, unlike *A Buried Land*, the TVA's position is privileged in *Wild River*, a film about the TVA's struggles to displace a Tennessee family, the Garths, as it plans a dam that will flood a large region along the Tennessee River. The perspective of the autochthonous agrarian is embodied by Ella, the aging matriarch of the Garth family. Ella refuses to leave her ancestral home, which is on an island in the middle of the Tennessee River, despite the fact that the TVA has employed laws of eminent domain in order to buy the valley's land and build a vast hydroelectric reservoir. In response to the TVA, Ella says,

I won't sell my land that I poured my heart's blood into... I like things running wild—like nature meant. There's already enough dams lockin' things up—tamin' 'em, makin' 'em go against their natural wants and needs. I'm again' dams of any kind. You can get me off by force, I reckon. It won't take much force, but it will take some. That's the only way you'll ever get me off, because I ain't going against nature. And I ain't a-crawlin' for no dang government.

Ultimately, though, Ella is displaced, and the TVA floods her family's farm. She then moves into a small house in a nearby town, and as the floodwaters cover the valley, her health deteriorates and she dies, ostensibly of a broken heart. Despite this dramatic narrative and despite the compelling reasons that Ella gives for not damming the "wild river," Elia Kazan shapes the

⁶³ The screenplay for *Wild River* is based on two novels about the TVA: William Bradford Huie's *Mud on the Stars* (1942) and Borden Deal's *Dunbar's Cove* (1957).

narrative of the film to side with the TVA field agent, Chuck Glover, who is in charge of the project. Additionally, Chuck falls in love with Ella's granddaughter Carol, and in the conclusion of the film, he whisks her away from the benighted South. The final shots of the film are of Chuck and Carol flying over the newly filled reservoir. As their plane approaches the TVA-built dam, the music swells to a triumphant crescendo and the last image of the film is a shot of the dam. The viewer is left to conclude not only that Chuck and Carol have escaped the provinciality of the South, but also that TVA has succeeded in ameliorating this provinciality by bringing the region closer to the experience of modernity shared by the rest of the nation.⁶⁴

Instead of the reductive presentation of the agrarian and industrial positions that are presented in *Wild River* and *A Buried Life*, Warren creates a more complex interrogation of both the tensions between agrarianism and industrialization as well as the tensions between a culture that is frozen in its backwardness and a culture that dedicates itself to homogenization. Warren counters these binaries by critiquing each pole. For example, in *Flood*, Yasha and Brad converse with one of the engineers for the dam project that will flood Fiddlersburg. The engineer states,

The dam was going to be a whopper, he said, and God knows they needed something here. Good hunting and fishing around here, he admitted, but Jesus, he said, the way people lived back in the swamp ground and what they called coves. And the towns, they ought to been drowned out long back. He was from Wisconsin, he said... And what good land there was—hell, they didn't know how to farm it anyway. But with power and cheap transportation it would all be different. A real skyline on the river, plant after plant. Getting shoes on the swamp rats too, teaching 'em to read and write and punch a time clock, and pull a

⁶⁴ For additional analysis of Kazan's *Wild River*, see my introduction.

switch. It was going to be a big industrial complex, he said. He liked the phrase, industrial complex. (113)

Obviously, the engineer's notions of social progress contrast sharply with the Southern Agrarians' anti-industrial worldview. Nevertheless, Warren enables the engineer to make many compelling arguments. In particular, the dam project, like the TVA, provides for the native inhabitants the potential for a better quality of life in that it will provide safety, education, and economic opportunities. Additionally, *Flood's* narrator suggests that after moving to the newly built community of Lake Town, the former inhabitants of Fiddlersburg will lose many negative, as well as positive, facets of their culture; significantly, the narrator notes that Lake Town will be racially integrated after the inhabitants of Fiddlersburg arrive (380). Thus, the dam and the destruction of Fiddlersburg will disrupt the antiquated racial divisions in Fiddlersburg, and the new town will not be able to implement segregation without causing problems, since the school will receive federal funding.

In conversations with the engineer, the characters grapple with the question of what exactly will be lost by the flooding of Fiddlersburg. Maggie insinuates that the town represents the South more broadly; she suggests that the place is "dying anyway," and she questions whether anything worthwhile has happened there since the Civil War (51). Then, assuming that Yasha suspects her of racism, Maggie notes that she does not wish to idealize antebellum southern identity; she says, "Oh, I don't mean there ought to be a lot of pickanannies rolling at the little cabin door" (51). Flustered, she pauses, and ultimately she concludes that "Maybe the place never did belong here. Maybe it never belonged anywhere" (51). Maggie implies that Fiddlersburg, and by extension the South, has fallen prey to a debilitating polarization: either the

town will have wealth, culture, and a slave economy, or it will have universal freedom and both cultural and economic stagnation.

Also present in this scene is Brad and Maggie's cousin Blanding Cottshill, who histrionically represents himself as a gentleman "farmer" who happens to practice "a little law" on the side (48). He contributes to the analysis of Fiddlersburg: "Mighty little happens here except things gradually falling apart. Not much excitement here since U.S. Grant and his ironclads puffed up-river. Then later on, the last steamboat tooted the whistle to lift plank, and things really got drowsy. And, I may add, money got scarce" (46). Like Maggie, Cottshill suggests that Fiddlersburg's historical, cultural, and economic significance ended with the Civil War, and since then the town has seen a steady and inevitable drying up of resources. Brad confirms Cottshill's estimation: "Fiddlersburg ... it is as far as you can get outside of history and still feel that history exists" (46). Throughout *Flood*, Brad lacks what Frederic Jameson calls historicity. In *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Jameson argues that a significant "symptom" of postmodern life is "the waning of our historicity, of our lived possibility of experiencing history in some active way" (21). Jameson implies that this disturbing deterioration of historicity is the result of a widespread historical illiteracy and a corresponding inability for postmodern people to understand the complications of the historical present.

Similar questions of historicity have been important for southern literary scholars during and after the Southern Renaissance. In the southern context, historicity has often been synonymous with Allen Tate's famous formulation of the "historical consciousness," which he claims catalyzed the significant flowering of literature during the Southern Renaissance (292). In "The Profession of Letters in the South" (1935), Tate argues that the strength of modern southern literature comes not from a link to the soil but rather an alienation from it. The southern writer's

“historical consciousness” is temporary, and functions to bring forth brilliant works of art only during a period of social and economic transition. In later essays, Tate would pronounce the death of the “historical consciousness” in no uncertain terms. According to Martyn Bone, Tate’s argument is that “unlike Lytle and Faulkner, emerging writers do not have the historical consciousness to gauge the modern destruction of the South (let alone an unmediated knowledge of the premodern South). Hence, not only southern literature but also southern literary criticism becomes, at best, a retrospective affair” (*The Postsouthern* 20). Tate’s argument has been extended by other southern literary scholars in recent years, including Lewis P. Simpson, who proposes “the closure of history,” and Fred Hobson who asserts that postmodern literary characters “are products of a society that disregards history” (18).

In *Flood*, even before the literal destruction of Fiddlersburg due to the damming of the river, Brad’s lack of historicity makes him feel like an exile both from his hometown and, more broadly, the South. In fact, from the beginning of the narrative, Brad argues that the “South” does not even exist except as what Benedict Anderson would call an “imagined community.” In the context of *Flood*, such a community is defined by a collective attempt to buttress the exceptionalism of regional history. For example, Brad asserts, “Folks say ‘the South,’ but the word doesn’t mean a damned thing. It is a term without a referent... Angry lonesomeness makes Southerners say the word South like an idiot Tibetan monk turning a broke-down prayer wheel on which he has forgot to hang any prayers... Hell, no Southerner believes that there is any South” (166). Despite this incredulity about how the community defines the South, Brad does acknowledge that the Confederate monument in the center of Fiddlersburg is the spiritual and ideological center of the white citizens’ proclaimed southernness:

Johnny Reb ... his monument... He's been standing there a long time now ... holding off gunboats and Yankee investors and new ideas. Didn't do so well with the gunboats, but made up for that on the other two counts... He is all that makes Fiddlersburg Southern. He is all that gives us the dignity of our defects. He is all that makes paranoid violence into philosophic virtue. Take him away and Fiddlersburg wouldn't be anything but a wore-out bunch of red-necks and reformed swamp rats that had crawled out on dry land, and the dry land nothing but a few acres of worthless real estate. Take Johnny Reb away, and Fiddlersburg would be just one more benighted ass-hole in the splendid derriere which we call the hinterland of America. Fiddlersburg would be just like Iowa. (256)

Brad then suggests that in the South monuments stand for lies; however, they are lies that are culturally significant, because they create identity, while the monuments in the North "don't stand for anything. Up there, a monument is merely an expensive roost for pigeons and a latrine for tired sparrows" (256). Therefore, the southern monument stands for "That lie that is the truth of the self" (256).

Michael O'Brien explains a similar cultural phenomenon, asserting that the search for southern identity is inherently rooted in paradox: "No man's South was the same as another's. Thus, ironically, a community was in fact created, for men could talk about different things while imagining that they discussed the same entity. Thus, for those who made the effort of self-awareness, the center could hold" (227). This community was also facilitated by what W.J. Cash calls "the savage ideal ... whereunder dissent and variety are completely suppressed and men become, in all their attitudes, professions, and actions, virtual replicas of one another" (90-91). In *Flood*, Brad's father Lank and his family are atypical amongst Fiddlersburg natives in that they

care little about southern identity. Consequently, Lank does not fall prey to the “savage ideal” because, as Brad asserts, he is “no victim of rhetoric he, no lackey of ideology” (122). In other words, he contends that his father is utterly “Free” (122). Brad remarks to Yasha that his family was split in terms of Union and Confederate sympathies, between his father’s family, the Tollivers, and his mother’s family, the Cottshills, respectively. His father, though, would have sided with neither faction, because he never felt anything like the weight of Cash’s “savage ideal.” Brad’s father’s history is similar to Sutpen’s in William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), because in the course of only a few years he transitions from a “true-born muskrat-skinner” to the wealthiest man in Fiddlersburg (53). Lank, too, is similar to Cash’s notion of the “man at the center” except that Lank never indulged in the southern mythmaking typical of Cash’s self-made man.

Instead of defining his identity relative to the performative processes of identity formation common to Fiddlersburg’s residents, Lank actually defines his identity through his relationship with the natural world. Therefore, Warren envisions culture for Lank as dependent on the environment, and Warren’s deconstruction of southern identity undergirds a uniquely bioregional perspective. Culture, in other words, should be understood relative to the palimpsest of the natural world and society. Similarly, Hendricks states, “If there is no ‘South,’ as Brad Tolliver says to Yasha Jones, there is nevertheless a Fiddlersburg, which is what Tolliver tells Jones he himself believes in: a matrix of event, kin, swamp, hill, and subjections in which individual being exists and *knows*—a concrete microregion with a specific terrain and history that shapes the consciousness of its inhabitants and its exiles” (157). This bioregional critique of traditional conceptions of regional identity resonates with contemporary theories of postsouthernism that have been explored by Lewis P. Simpson, Michael Kreyling, Martyn Bone,

and Scott Romine. In *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (2005), Bone contends that Warren's 1977 novel *A Place to Come To* demonstrates Warren's "postsouthern turn," because it "offers a subtly parodic interrogation of 'the South,' 'southern literature,' and 'sense of place'—complexly commingled with a residual antipathy toward the capitalist reproduction of 'the South'" (55). While I agree with Bone's interpretation of *A Place to Come To*, I do not think that this is Warren's first "postsouthern turn"; rather, if one considers *Flood* a novel engaged with bioregional theorizations of place that render more traditional regional conceptions of southern identity obsolete, then *Flood* marks a "postsouthern turn" in Warren's work that transpired a decade and a half before *A Place to Come To*.

Perhaps Warren's most interesting development of the bioregional perspective in *Flood* involves his use of the French phrase "nostalgie de la boue." This nostalgia or yearning for the mud defines Lank throughout the narrative; and despite the fact that Lank ends up owning almost all of Fiddlersburg, he largely hates the culture of the town. Brad tells Yasha that when he was young his father went back to the swamp, his place of birth, every few months and came back somewhat "quieted down. For a whole week he wouldn't kick a leg off Chippendale" (117). At first Brad suspected that in the swamp his father was hunting and fishing, visiting relatives, or even having an affair with a woman who lived there. However, Brad finally realizes the truth, which is that Lank is quite literally driven by "nostalgie de la boue" (118). When he was young, Brad followed his father on one of these outings and witnessed him rubbing mud all over his naked body, before weeping uncontrollably and ultimately passing out.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "nostalgie de la boue" as "A longing for sexual or social degradation; a desire to regress to more primitive social conditions or behaviours than those to which a person is accustomed." Similarly, Freud illustrates this yearning for and

romanticization of the seemingly “uncivilized” by the seemingly “civilized” in *Civilization and its Discontents* (1930), which explores the ways in which society often represses the instinctual urges of the individual and thereby engenders discontentment. Art theorist Rosalind Krauss notes that the Museum of Modern Art uses the phrase “nostalgie de la boue” “to characterize that aspect of the surrealists’ recourse to the operations of the unconscious which led them in turn to valorize whole ranges of expressive behavior that had been subject to social control and repression...” (111). These definitions, however, do not fit Warren’s purposes in *Flood*. While the novel illustrates cultural slumming, this standard definition does not fully encompass Warren’s reason for using this phrase. Although “nostalgie de la boue” has been employed since the mid-nineteenth century to indicate a predilection for romanticizing unfettered behaviors and “primitive” peoples, Lank’s “nostalgie de la boue” quite literally refers to a yearning for mud or the land rather than a yearning for some atavistic primitivism. This is an important facet of Warren’s bioregionalist project in this novel because the characters’ romance (as indicated by the subtitle) is not for a bygone culture but rather for a bygone landscape. Therefore, Warren’s “nostalgie de la boue” is more closely related to the phrase’s original usage in Emile Augier’s *Le Mariage d’Olympe* (1855). In this play, a woman who has married above her social class says, “A swan is a swan, but a duck who thinks itself a swan will find itself longing for the mud in which it was laid.” Lank’s fondness for the mud parallels a broader human desire for spaces outside of human society,⁶⁵ and even Warren’s naming of this character, Lank, suggests his indelible connection to the Land. For the characters in Warren’s novel, this longing for the land is particularly poignant because the landscape for which they long will be buried by a flood, thus rendering it forever inaccessible and the desire for it insatiable.

⁶⁵ Moreover, as we see with Lank, such “wild” spaces often exist outside the confines of the normative order and thus serve as “sites of identity crisis and metamorphosis, as the domains of the monstrous and terrifying, places of religious insight or of rites of passage, as in the biblical ‘wilderness’” (Clark 25).

Leonard Casper seeks to bridge the gap between Lank and his son Brad. While Casper is correct in pointing out the parallels between Lank's return to nature and Brad's return to his native Fiddlersburg (44), Casper is inaccurate in his assertion that "Brad manages to come to terms with his biological father once he understands the land to which the man mystically belonged..." (18). Casper's interpretation falls short in that Brad is never able to understand the land in *Flood*; this precludes his broader understanding of place and consequently his understanding of himself. Although Brad often visits the swamp, both as a teenager and as an adult, he does not do so because of a sense of "nostalgie de la boue." Rather he visits the swamp merely as an excuse to get drunk, and the narrator notes that drunkenness "is the nearest Bradwell Tolliver comes to Zen" (54); therefore, drunkenness is Brad's best substitute for the tonic of wilderness that his father experienced in the swamp.

Brad remains throughout the novel unable to feel at home in Fiddlersburg, in the natural world surrounding Fiddlersburg, or in his native South. Thus one of the most prominent tropes of the novel, as many critics have pointed out, is exile. Within the narrative, Brad examines his own status as a displaced and/or exiled former inhabitant of Fiddlersburg and the South in his critically hailed book of fiction, which he wrote about his departure from the town and region. In the opening scene of *Flood*, just before Brad arrives at The Seven Dwarves Motel, he ruminates upon the publication and success of *I'm Telling You Now*. As Bradwell thinks about his book, he remembers the glowing reviews that followed its publication in 1935. One such review praises the book because it deals with the "the sudden recognition of unconscious courage, of the pathos of the lost man, the common man, clinging to some dignity in the midst of personal ignominy, loss of identity and general social wreckage" (6). Later, the narrator paraphrases another review that discussed Brad's efforts to document the South: "He had reported, without flinching,

extenuation, or romanticism, the degradation of life in his native region. He exhibited an instinctive awareness of social problems, and with maturity and doctrine he might be counted upon to make an important contribution” (61). Based on these two reviews, the reader of *Flood* perceives the overarching thematic mission of Brad’s work. First, he is dealing with the “lost man,” one who has become unmoored culturally and geographically and, therefore, has experienced a “loss of identity and general social wreckage.” Second, he equates this loss of identity with the broader trend of the “degradation of life in his native region.” Finally, the reader is aware that all of these issues are for Brad not only personal but actually autobiographical. Brad, like his father, does not suffer from the “savage ideal,” and his unflinching, unromantic depiction of the underbelly of southern culture is the direct result not of an engagement with the natural world above culture (as was the case with Lank) but rather it is the result of his status as the exile, which enables him to gaze upon his town and region with an outsider’s perspective.

Throughout *Flood*, Brad repeatedly refers to Jewish history, and he often draws a direct parallel between the Jewish and the southern experiences of being exiled. The central subject of Brad’s book *I’m Telling You Now* is Israel Goldfarb, an elderly Jewish tailor in Fiddlersburg who befriends young Brad. Even after writing his book, Brad still struggles to discern why exactly Goldfarb played such a major role in shaping his understanding of his native community. In one of the early scenes of *Flood*, as Brad is waiting to pick up Yasha from the airport, he ruminates upon the meaning of the “exotic” and can think only of Goldfarb:

But he said comically to himself that he was enough the true-born son of Fiddlersburg to carry the image of a Jew in his head as the archetypal image of all exoticism, especially of that exoticism of secret wisdom and slightly sinister learning which might prevail beyond the common, robust satisfaction of life, and

which, in fact, might make ordinary men, wedded to their ordinary satisfaction, feel confused, depressed and, of course, angry. (15)

Later in the novel, Brad expands this idea, asserting that Goldfarb “is Fiddlersburg” and “He made me see Fiddlersburg” (165). In this moment, Brad realizes that Goldfarb’s outsider status enables him to see truths otherwise hidden to the town’s natives. As a result, Goldfarb possesses “what is most valuable for the outsider: perspective. That gift is a realism not always possible for the insider” (Justus 320). Because of the deep empathy that he shares with Goldfarb and because of his own status as an outsider in Fiddlersburg, Brad gains a perspective of the town through Goldfarb and a deeper understanding of the meaning of home, which Warren cleverly links to the idea of the Jewish homeland by naming this character Israel.

Warren himself believed that southerners and Jews were “persecuted minorities” (qtd. in Justus 319), and, he argued, the two groups share a substantive connection in their status as wanderers and in their representations of the wanderer figure in literary narratives. Two contemporary scholars—Eliza Russi Lowen McGraw and Randy Hendricks—have examined the ways in which Warren’s southern characters often arrive at a better understanding of themselves by understanding Jewish history and identity formation. Additionally, both McGraw and Hendricks seek to link the southern/Jewish trope to a larger trend in southern literature. For instance, in “‘Alone but Not Lonesome’: Jewishness in Robert Penn Warren’s ‘Flood’” (1998), McGraw contends that “Frequently, the patent representations of Jewishness in Southern texts, including Warren’s Izzie, conform to the Elijah trope. Jews serve . . . as ‘a clue’ to comprehending the Southerner’s self-understanding” (122-23). McGraw also acknowledges that many scholars have pointed out that the mystification of Jewish identity can hinder Jewish

“normalization”; at the same time, though, she emphasizes that the Elijah trope in southern texts “colludes Southernness and Jewishness.”

Hendricks maintains that figures of exile, such as southerners and Jews, play a prominent role in Warren’s own literary corpus as well as in what he calls “postheroic” modern southern literature. Building upon Michael Kreyling’s *Figures of the Hero in Southern Narrative* (1987), Hendricks argues that many antebellum and Reconstruction southern narratives, featuring the backwoodsman or cavalier hero, end with a return home (6). Many twentieth-century southern narratives, on the other hand, begin with a return to the space that was once considered “home”: “It is the story of the problem of *home* for the modern Southerner, who has at least the idea, perhaps the illusion, that he used to have a home but is homeless now because of some change, perhaps some catastrophe” (17). Furthermore, Hendricks asserts that this issue affected southerners in particular because during the twentieth century “nine million Southerners ... migrated out of the region and even more ... moved from the farm to towns and cities by 1960” (16).

While the exile figure has a powerful resonance in southern literature because of the region’s mass displacement, many fiction writers and scholars have argued that the exile experience is by no means unique to the South. Lewis P. Simpson, for example, asserts that the exile trope and exile sensibility are endemic in twentieth-century life and literature, and therefore are ubiquitous in the works of Conrad, Yeats, Joyce, Stein, Pound, Eliot, and Hemingway as well as Faulkner or Wolfe. Simpson writes, “All the writers who have come of age in the twentieth century ... whether they have known actual exile or not, have been affected by emotions associated with *depaysement*, or the nostalgic yearning for a lost homeland” (*The Fable* 141-42). Similarly, Norman Wirzba argues that twentieth-century American life is marked by an

environmental, economic, and spiritual “precariousness,” and, consequently, “It is no accident that literature on the themes of ‘home’ and ‘community’ is growing by leaps and bounds, as more and more people are seeking to ground their existence in something that is durable, safe, and life promoting” (9).

Warren’s use of the exile figure, while representing a broader social condition and literary trope, was based on his own observations of and experiences with his native region. After 1942, Warren never lived in the South again, and he visited infrequently and only for short periods. At various times throughout his adult life, Warren lived in California, Minnesota, Connecticut, Vermont, England, Italy, and France (Rio 127-28). According to Hendricks, “The question of Southernness generally and his own identity as a Southerner particularly was a burning one for Warren, early and late—if anything, more intense in the later work as it grows out of a more personal quest for at-homeness in the world” (21-22). Warren himself often commented on this vexing relationship with the South and the difficulty of attaining precisely this sense of “at-homedness in the world.” In a 1978 interview, Warren stated, “I know many Southerners who, from babyhood on, hated the South, or felt inferior because of it, and so wanted out. . . . And at the same time, they never found a world to live in; they’re people without place. They’re cut off from one world and never really entered another one” (qtd. in Hendricks 21). This displacement, at least for Warren, was not entirely self-imposed.

In an interview with Louis D. Rubin, Jr., and William Styron that took place in the late 1970s, Warren explained that he had not wanted to leave the South or his position at Louisiana State University in the 1940s; rather he asserted that he was rejected by the university and all but forced to flee the South:

I wanted to live in the South, you see; I'm a refugee from the South, driven out, as it were. The place I wanted to live, the place I thought was heaven to me, after my years of wandering, was Middle Tennessee, which is a beautiful country, or *was* a beautiful country—it's rapidly being ruined. But I couldn't make it work. When I went back to teach for three years there, I enjoyed living in the country, and driving in to do my teaching, and this was fine. But I was let out of Vanderbilt University, and had to go elsewhere for a job. I went to Louisiana State University, which was quite fortunately a very exciting place. And I left Louisiana only because I felt I wasn't wanted. I felt pressure to leave. It wasn't a choice. I had settled myself down and bought a house in the country—settled down for life I assumed. I left, shall we say, under pressure of some kind or another. I wasn't fired. I left out of pride. I went to Minnesota, which I enjoyed... The point is that I, unlike Bill [Styron], didn't make a choice of living outside the South. I always felt myself somehow squeezed out of the South, which is a very different thing from Bill's conscious choice. This is a generational matter, perhaps; I don't know. (qtd. in Simpson, *The Fable* 139-40)

Warren's rhetoric here, as well as in similar interviews, remains vague, and he does not fully elaborate on why he felt so rejected by the South. One may speculate, though, that Warren's rejection was the result of his increasingly progressive views, especially on issues involving racial politics.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Although dedicated throughout his life to some of agrarianism's more innocuous tenets, Warren's dedication to white, conservative, southern identity was called into question as early as 1930, and from then on he made very deliberate attempts to divorce himself from such perspectives. For instance, after the publication of *I'll Take My Stand*, Warren told his friend Ralph Ellison that he lamented his conservatism in "The Briar Patch." Warren went on to write several important works dealing with racial politics, including *Brother to Dragons: A Tale in Verse and Voices* (1953), *Segregation: The Inner Conflict in the South* (1956), and *Who Speaks for the Negro?* (1965).

Warren's alienation from his native region manifests itself in many of his novels and poems. *Flood* is particularly relevant in this regard because Brad, Warren's surrogate, struggles through many of the same issues that concerned Warren; and just as Brad's *I'm Telling You Now* is deeply autobiographical, Warren's *Flood* is largely based on his own life experiences. In *The Fable of the Southern Writer* (1994), Simpson explores precisely this type of "autobiographical motive" in southern writers as a way to discover in the "southern literary imagination [the relationship] between history and self-biography" (xv). Simpson argues that "The obligation of the writer to serve as a witness, not to the actual historical event, but to the remembrance of it, was a force in shaping the vocation of the writer in the South" (74). Simpson also asserts that *All the King's Men*, *Flood*, and *A Place to Come To* are "'shadowy' autobiographical responses" to the experience of rejection from the South in 1942 (141). However, Simpson stresses that Warren's works always transcend mere autobiography and that the reader should keep in mind Warren's well-known essay on Thomas Wolfe, in which he argues that Wolfe should "recollect that Shakespeare merely wrote *Hamlet*; he was *not* Hamlet" (qtd. in Simpson 143). Unlike Wolfe, whom Warren accused of using fiction merely to record his own life story, Warren used material from his own life, principally his strained relationship with place and home, to comment on more universal issues. In particular, according to Simpson, Warren utilizes his own "alienation from the South" to demonstrate a common "sensitivity of exile and deracination" that represents the "pervasive compulsion of the modern poet and novelist, as necessity of being in the world, to establish an identity through self-portrayal in a figure of exile" (141-43). Warren's fiction represents the tension between the local and the universal, the desire to capture the particular and the general, and, as a result, his work is marked by "a tragic opposition between the love of home and the necessity of exile" (152).

Warren dramatizes his “autobiographical motive” through the characters of Brad and Cottshill, and in *Flood* Warren stages his own conflicts about how to write about a place from which he is an exile. Yasha’s desire is for Brad’s screenplay to attain the bioregionalist goal of “counter[ing] the rootless and displaced character of contemporary American society by illuminating the complex ecology of local environments and how those environments affect the life of those who live within them” (Kowalewski 31). However, Brad’s outsider perspective, highlighted by his relationship with Israel Goldfarb, while sometimes a boon for his artistic endeavors, prevents him from ever fully immersing himself in the place or culture of Fiddlersburg.

Warren counters Brad’s alienation from Fiddlersburg with Cottshill’s deep rootedness. At least in his younger days, before the troubles of his family and the flooding of the town, Cottshill says that he was able to live “all of a piece, in himself and with things around him” (345). Later, he remarks that in Fiddlersburg “There’s some spooky interpenetration of things, a mystic osmosis of being, you might say” (423). From a bioregionalist perspective, Cottshill—more than any other character except for Lank—is closest to the ecosystems of his native place, and his identity is most closely linked with that place. Perhaps not coincidentally, he is the only character in the novel who is actively engaged in agriculture. However, while Cottshill is often connected to the natural ecologies of Fiddlersburg, he feels alienated from certain factions of society, because he is the most progressive member of the white community, especially on racial issues. Not only is Cottshill’s only friend Brother Pinkney—the preacher of the town’s African American church and the founder of the town’s chapter of the NAACP—but also he is involved in a long-standing romantic relationship with a local African American woman named Roselle. At the end of *Flood*, Brad meets Cottshill and they discuss the fact that the dam has already

closed off the river and the water is slowly beginning to flood the town (380). Cottshill says that he may move to Scotland to avoid being asked to be the lawyer for a contentious, upcoming case that involves the integration of Lake Town's schools. In the end, though, Cottshill does take the case and defends integration. This causes his girlfriend Roselle to leave him, because she fears what the KKK will do to him if they find out not only that he supports integration but also that they are romantically involved (426). Despite all of this duress, Cottshill finally says he will not go to Scotland because he could not feel "real" there; instead, in an effort to reestablish a sense of home, he purchases another farm outside of the valley that is soon to be flooded.

Repeatedly throughout the narrative, Cottshill argues that humans are fundamentally corrupt and therefore deserve to be flooded. Early in the novel, he says, "Let 'em flood us... Never was a place—or a society, for that matter—didn't deserve drowning out... But you know, that moment when some place is just overpassed but still extant and waiting for the flood, that's the time you can see its virtues and vices most clearly" (48). If Cottshill hoped that the inhabitants of Fiddlersburg would show their virtues more than vices, he was largely disappointed. In particular, the fact that the inhabitants fail to integrate peacefully prompts Cottshill to reassert his initial apocalyptic pronouncement: "And now ... they're going to flood us, and that will solve a lot. Maybe they should flood the whole country, Maine to California" (349).

Given the tumultuous social context of the South and the nation in the early 1960s, and given Cottshill's progressive stance on interracial relationships, his involvement in the narrative necessitates a new interpretation of the novel's epigraph, Amos 9: 15: "And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God." Upon first seeing this epigraph, the reader may assume that Warren is

critiquing the TVA and its large-scale flood projects. However, one must revise this interpretation when one confronts Cottshill's tendency to parallel the flood of Fiddlersburg and the Biblical cleansing of a corrupt society. This cultural cleaning is also featured in the book of Amos when God promises to "let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream" (Amos 5:24). Despite the strong desire for social justice Cottshill voices in the last pages of the novel, he still mourns the loss of his native community and the effect of that loss on people's identities: "The funeral of Fiddlersburg... Yeah, and when Fiddlersburg is under water, God-A-Mighty will jerk our passports. We will be stateless persons. We will be DPs for eternity thence forward. We will have no identity" (423). Cottshill's perspective is paradoxical in that he advocates for social progress in the South, while also mourning the loss of this community's distinctiveness. Cottshill celebrates the South moving in the direction of the rest of the nation regarding racial segregation, but he resents the TVA's destruction of his native landscape, because with its loss he also loses a significant facet of his identity.

Compared to Cottshill, Brad is doubly the exile. While Cottshill is alienated from certain racist factions of the white community, he retains an identity linked to place (even though he has to shift that place after the flood). Brad, by contrast, can connect neither to place nor culture. His status as a double exile explains his rather ambivalent analysis of the relation of identity to place—"He wondered, what of himself—of Bradwell Tolliver—would not be here, or anywhere, when Fiddlersburg was not here anymore" (254). Antithetically, Cottshill's conflation of identity and place is clear: Fiddlersburg is the only place where he can "feel real" (426). Brad's double alienation from place and culture contributes first to his complete artistic blockage, and then to his inability to produce a screenplay that satisfies Yasha Jones's artistic vision.

As an artist, Brad fails to overcome a debilitating southern self-consciousness that is motivated by his heightened awareness of the world that exists outside the South. Such awareness, according to some of the Agrarians, violates the autochthonous ideal of the southern artist. Fred Hobson defines Donald Davidson's conception of the "autochthonous ideal" as the "condition in which the writer was in a certain harmony with the social and cultural environment, was nearly *unconscious* of it as a 'special' environment, quaint or rustic or backward, and thus was not motivated by any urge to interpret or explain" (80). Lacking the social and artistic harmony of the autochthonous ideal, the writer may run the risk of employing stereotypes (and becoming, in essence, a local colorist) or may feel unduly responsible for explaining or justifying the folkways of her or his native region: "the Southerner, if he is not careful, is always in danger of becoming too much the self-conscious regionalist, one who begins with the recognition that he or she is primarily a 'southern writer' with an opportunity and obligation to present or interpret Southerners to the rest of the nation" (Hobson 79). However, Hobson is quick to point out that generally the best art is produced not when artists are at peace with their environments but rather when they are in conflict.⁶⁷

Yet, in demonstrating Brad's failure to produce a satisfactory screenplay, Warren manages to produce a powerful novel that explores the tension between desiring to live in harmony with a place and culture and knowing that such an autochthonous state is nearly impossible to realize. Moreover, Warren's novel seems to be engaging in a dialogue with Faulkner's Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech (1950), in which he states: "the problems of the human heart in conflict with itself [...] alone can make good writing because only that is worth

⁶⁷ Rita Barnard makes similar observations, as she contends that this sense of conflict is what makes modernist fiction so compelling: "In the case of the modern American writer, however, one must specify that the 'return' would not exactly be a journey *home*... The 'return' was more likely to involve the discovery of forms in which a sense of being out of place or off-center could be turned to aesthetic advantage. Modern American fiction, as [Alfred] Kazin observes, is characterized by a sense of 'alienation *on* native grounds'" (47).

writing about, worth the agony and the sweat” (119). The logic of *Flood* suggests that Brad is able to produce his early, successful book *I’m Telling You Now* precisely because when it was published in 1935, Brad possessed both an insider and an outsider status in the context of the South; thus he experienced the “human heart in conflict with itself.” However, by the early 1960s, as he is attempting to write the screenplay about the flooding Fiddlersburg, he has become so thoroughly an outsider that there is no conflict and, consequently, he cannot produce a narrative “worth writing about.” The timeline presented in *Flood* is consistent with Tate’s theory of the southern “historical consciousness.” Tellingly, Warren has Brad publish *I’m Telling You Now* in the same year as the publication of Tate’s “The Profession of Letters in the South,” in which Tate defines the “historical consciousness.” Brad’s early works are “southern” because they are written during a period of extreme transition in the South (i.e. the Southern Renaissance). Yet, Brad’s writing in the early 1960s represents his “waning of historicity,” to use Jameson’s phrase, as well as his alienation from both the human and natural communities of his native region.

From the earliest passages of *Flood*, Warren calls the reader’s attention to the fact that this is a metafictional novel obsessed with evaluating how art depicts reality. More than in any of his previous novels, Warren turns his attention in *Flood* to an examination of professional artists. Furthermore, Casper notes, “The principal communication of *Flood* concerns man’s compulsion to communicate: to confess, and be justified; to be shared by and known to others, beyond repudiation” (41-2). Brad’s double-exile—from both culture and the environment—is complimented by the *Flood*’s double-meta-vision of the exile figure, which Warren develops by making the novel both metafictional and metafilmic, in that *Flood* is simultaneously about the

difficulties of depicting reality in fiction *and* film.⁶⁸ By changing the artistic medium in which his surrogate artist (Brad) works, Warren attains a degree of objectivity that would have otherwise been difficult to grasp if the project were purely metafictional. In other words, creating a novel that is both metafictional and metafilmic enables Warren's double meta-vision of the exile figure and the (post)modern artist. Throughout *Flood*, Brad and Yasha frequently debate whether it is possible for either medium, film or fiction, to move beyond stereotypical depictions of cultures and landscapes. At stake in these debates is the fact that Fiddlersburg could be destroyed not only by the imminent flood but also by inaccurate fictional and cinematic representations.

In both media, film and fiction, the characters' "compulsion to communicate" (Casper 41-42) is most difficult when attempting to represent a culture that appears "exotic," and the problem, for both insiders and outsiders, becomes how to see beyond stereotypes. During Yasha and Brad's first dinner at the Fiddler's house, Yasha remarks how beautiful the gardens are, to which Maggie responds "Oh, it's charming by moonlight" (45). Then, hearing a mockingbird sing, she says, "Coming just in time to help the moonlight maintain your kind illusions" (46). She also tells Yasha that in the daylight he should look over the garden wall and there he will see a hundred and fifty years of garbage which has simply been tossed over the wall by the house's various inhabitants. This, Maggie promises, will give Yasha "a touch of reality" (46). *Flood* is a novel that is principally concerned with the need for artists to delve beneath such tired

⁶⁸ Warren's interest in the metafilmic may in part stem from his experience with the film industry in the decades preceding *Flood*. For instance, in the summer of 1949, Warren went to California to assist Robert Rossen in both the writing and finally the editing of the film version of *All the Kings Men* (Blotner 251). According to Warren, the editing of the movie was unusually difficult because "the director shot thousands and thousands of extra feet of film" (qtd. in Blotner 251-52). Later endeavors may have also contributed to Warren's interest in the art of filmmaking, such as his friendship with Charlie Chaplin (252) and the fact that his novel *Band of Angels* was also made into a major feature film in 1957 starring Clark Gable, Yvonne De Carlo, and Sidney Poitier (302). This exposure to the film industry likely affected both the content and formal aspects of Warren's fiction writing; some critics have even argued that his later novels "were aimed at Hollywood" (Blotner 264).

stereotypes of a place. In this early passage, Warren explores this theme, and, through Maggie, he suggests that the characters must constantly look beyond the superficial romance of a particular place in order to discern a more complex picture of place that takes into account both the romance of the garden and the trash that lies just beyond the garden wall.

Like Maggie, Yasha is preoccupied with the apparent stereotypes that he confronts while dining in Fiddlersburg for the first time. Looking around at the “kind illusions” of the “dark house, garden, moon, ruined terrace,” and the singing mockingbirds, Yasha puzzles over how he would depict such a scene in a film:

It was all a perfect cliché, he said to himself. He wondered wryly, what they would say if he—Yasha Jones—put this in his picture, absolutely as it was. But Yasha Jones, he reflected, was cunning enough not to put this in his picture just as it was. He would, very cunningly, do something to it so that it would no longer be what it actually was, what it really was, but because it was unreal would be taken for real. Yes, reality was the uncapturable. That was why we need illusion.

Truth through lie, he thought. Only in the mirror, over your shoulder, he thought, does the ghost appear. (50)

The scene in the garden confirms southern stereotypes so completely that Yasha assumes that if he put these elements in a film he would have to alter them in order to capture something more interesting than this stereotype-confirming reality; thus, his fear is that the “unreal would be taken for real” (50).

These early investigations of the artistic uses and limits of stereotypes begin an important thematic thread that will continue throughout the novel. For example, in discussing the scope of their film, Yasha and Brad ruminate about the difference between documentation and artistic

vision (102-03). Yasha says that while documentation is imperative in a narrative, he hopes to “document the vision” of a particular location and culture, and to convey that vision through the documentation. Brad succeeded in accomplishing this task in *I’m Telling You Now*, which is why Yasha hired him to write the film about Fiddlersburg in the first place. This is Warren’s task in *Flood*, too; he must document the multiplicity of material reality and capture the complex details of individuals’ lives. However, at the same time, he must not merely rely on the quotidian, and he must not fall back on stereotypes. Similarly, Yasha contends that “Life ... is so logical—superficially, that is—therefore so plotty... But ... don’t we [as writers] have to violate life? To stylize life?” (127). Although life is inherently “plotty,” Yasha maintains that good films (and novels) should not be; rather the objective of art is “To give the impression of the mysterious inwardness of life ... not the obvious plottiness... To be overwhelmed with the outward, moving multiplicity, of the world—that means we can never see, really see, or love the single life falling. And, therefore, can never love life, the inwardness of life” (127). Throughout the novel, Yasha is not impressed by Brad’s diatribes about the idiosyncrasies of life in Fiddlersburg and the South. Yasha says, “What you make—it will not be exotic... Ah, that is the danger—you don’t know how exotic Fiddlersburg is! But there is something else here, too. Archetypally human, archetypally simple, and therefore precious” (261-2). At its most basic level, Yasha and Brad’s argument is about how best to represent the people of Fiddlersburg—i.e. how to do the work of the ethnographer. Brad tends to rely on southern stereotypes as he criticizes the people of his native region, while Yasha strives to take the perspective of a structural anthropologist, longing to uncover the “archetypes” of this place; in other words, he hopes to demonstrate how the community’s practices signify a universal, albeit antiquated, human experience.

When Brad finally completes a screenplay based on the flooding of Fiddlersburg, Yasha is dissatisfied with it because it is a “parody” and not a distillation of archetypes (340-2). Despite the parodic nature of the screenplay, Yasha acknowledges that it is formally perfect: “He knew that there wasn’t a bolt out of place or a nut loose. He let his mind run over the thing, not the content, just the wonderful clean shape of it, and felt delighted with that shapeliness... It was a kind of delight, he thought, that existed by itself without reference to *before’s* or *after’s*” (340-41). In this passage, Warren provides a rather veiled critique of New Criticism. Through Yasha, Warren suggests that form and content are necessarily interconnected and that in order for works of art to be great they must pay sufficient attention to both. Form, while providing valuable aesthetic cohesion, without proper content fails to capture the archetypes about which Yasha is so concerned. Moreover, if “passion becomes idea through order” as Warren has argued (qtd. in Guttenberg 162), then the artist must also recognize that the ultimate order must not sublimate the passion or the idea. Brad’s script is formally perfect but it is ultimately devoid of what Brad himself calls the “heart business” (231). Therefore, according to the logic of the novel, the reason Brad cannot produce a meaningful screenplay is that he is so thoroughly alienated from his culture and environment that he does not possess the “heart in conflict,” which Tate and Faulkner claim is necessary to produce meaningful art. Based on the reviews of *I’m Telling You Now*, Brad had once mastered the “heart business”; however, in the two decades in which he has been away from Tennessee, his “heart” appears to be completely alienated from rather than conflicted about his native region.

When Yasha attempts to explain his criticisms to Brad, he reiterates the fact that he is not interested in plot and that instead “what matters is the feeling” of the film, which Brad has failed to capture. Brad misunderstands Yasha and assumes that he wants more, rather than less,

stereotypically southern material in the film. As a result, he says, “I’ll put platoons of darkies on River Street all singing ‘Suwanee River.’ I’ll put a whiskey-ad colonel weeping at the base of the Confederate monument while the rising waters lap his bony old shins” (343). Later as Yasha again articulates his critique of the screenplay, he emphasizes that he wants neither a romanticized idyll nor a condescending parody (393). Yasha is not interested in any sort of profit-driven approach to the creation of their film, and thus he is not interested in peddling stereotypes, even if regional and national audiences may be hungry for them. In *The Seeds of Time* (1993), Jameson applies the “logic of late capitalism” directly to local and regional cultures, contending that they have been so inundated by corporations that it is “difficult to decide whether [these cultures are] authentic any longer (and indeed whether that term still means anything)” (204-5). Jameson calls this process of acculturation “the EPCOT syndrome” in which “global American Disneyland-related corporations ... will redo your own native architecture [or art] for you more exactly than you can do it for yourself.” The EPCOT-ization of the South is precisely the literary and cinematic tendency that Yasha is attempting to avoid in the film.

In the conclusion of *Flood*, Yasha decides not to make the film about the flooding of Fiddlersburg. Instead he has moved to Greece and dedicated himself to the task of making “Something pure in feeling and classic in form,” which seems to have been his goal for the Fiddlersburg film all along (407). Although the producer of the Fiddlersburg film is still keen on moving the project forward, Brad’s enthusiasm for the film wanes after Yasha abandons it. In the closing pages of the novel, Brad thinks that his artistic endeavors have been like the “empty form” that a crazy man repeats over and over “to re-establish the connection that had existed before the weight of ice broke the [telephone] wires” (438). Again this could be read as a critique

of the New Critics' tendency to overemphasize form while deemphasizing substantive and meaningful contexts and content. After Brad realizes that the content rather than the form of his screenplay had failed to capture Fiddlersburg before it was flooded, he tears up a telegram from his producer, thinking that perhaps one day in the distant future he will return to the project. However, Brad believes that in order to write the screenplay adequately, he will have to alter both his relationship to and understanding of his native social and environmental communities. The regional triumph of *Flood* is that the inhabitants of Fiddlersburg may be progressing socially, particularly regarding issues of race, which may ameliorate Brad's sense of cultural alienation; however, the bioregional tragedy of *Flood* is that the landscapes surrounding Fiddlersburg have been buried under a TVA reservoir, which may exacerbate Brad's sense of environmental alienation.

At the end of *Flood*, as Brad watches the waters rise around Fiddlersburg, he says to himself, "*There is no country but the heart*" (440). This attempt to internalize a sense of place does not necessarily demonstrate Brad's growth and maturity, as most critics have maintained; instead, this desperate comment reiterates the fact that Brad actually has "no country," because he finds the provincialism of the South and the crass materialism and homogenization of the nation equally reprehensible. Consequently, Brad, who has remained throughout the narrative an exile from both culture and geography, will continue to draw inward, will continue the self-stigmatization of the disaffected, solipsistic post-World War II figure. In the final epiphanic moments of *Flood*, Warren seems to undermine the bioregionalist position, by affirming a kind of "a regionalism of the mind" (Wendell Berry, qtd. in Kowalewski 81). However, Brad's epiphany that "*There is no country but the heart*" (440) does not validate a nomadic transregional or transnational culture. Rather his placelessness and seeming confirmation of that

placelessness at the novel's conclusion seal his fate as an exile, particularly since Brad's native community has been destroyed by the TVA. Brad's consciousness of home in his own heart may solve Warren's perennial dilemma of the alienation of the self from the self, but what remains is the alienation of the self from external reality. In *Flood*, Warren examines whether an outsider or an exile can properly present a vision, rather than a mere documentation, of a place. As an exile from culture and environment, when Brad returns to the South, he remains a tourist rather than an autochthonous resident. The strength of the novel, however, lies not in Warren's ability to capture a place but rather in his metafictional and metafilmic evaluation of the difficulty of capturing a place. For Warren, this artistic dilemma is thematized in *Flood*—a novel that functions best as an exploration of the social and environmental conditions in which books and films are successfully produced.

Compared to those writers who preceded him with their dogmatic allegiance to either agrarianism or industrialization, and compared to those writers who followed him with their vehement environmentalist agendas, Warren broaches the topic of hydropolitics in a relatively evenhanded manner. *Flood* ultimately suggests that the TVA engendered both positive and negative social and environmental ramifications in the American South. Although Warren's novel is preoccupied with how humans define themselves in relation to the regions and bioregions in which they dwell, it does not provide a clear environmentalist message. Warren's approach to hydropolitics became rare throughout the 1960s and 1970s. In the years following *Flood*, the resistance to water containment and contagion became increasingly radical and politicized, as I will discuss relative to John Cheever, James Dickey, Edward Abbey, and Leslie Marmon Silko in the following chapters.

CHAPTER III

“Some Sort of Conflict”: Hydrological Containment and Cultures of Repression in John Cheever’s “The Swimmer” and James Dickey’s *Deliverance*

But the wilderness had found him out early, and had taken on him a terrible vengeance for the fantastic invasion. I think it had whispered to him things about himself which he did not know, things of which he had no conception till he took counsel with this great solitude – and the whisper had proved irresistibly fascinating.

- Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1899

At first glance, the connections between John Cheever—the sharp-witted master stylist of *The New Yorker*—and James Dickey—the bow-hunting, motorcycle-riding, southern agrarian—may appear tenuous at best. Yet, these two writers share, and their fictions reflect, many of the same anxieties regarding cultural and environmental repression, homogenization, and degradation. This chapter seeks to explore the relationship between the postwar period’s burgeoning environmental movement and the culture of abundance and leisure. Both Cheever and Dickey demonstrate in their fiction an acute concern for the preservation of the nation’s environment, particularly the preservation of those ecosystems that appear both pristine and “wild.” More specifically, Cheever and Dickey deploy images of water, both free-flowing and

contained, to represent the homogenization of the natural world as well as the shift from first nature (i.e. nature undisturbed by humans) to second nature (i.e. nature cultivated for human use).⁶⁹ Furthermore, Cheever and Dickey use water containment as an extended metaphor for the culture of repression that developed in post-World War II America; fittingly for this project, Alan Nadel argues that this period was marked by what he calls “containment culture”—the tendency for postwar Americans to tout the “virtue of conformity” and to enforce strict controls over any behavior that violates a Christian, middle-class, and heterosexual normativity (4). In this regard, Cheever’s and Dickey’s biographies inform my reading of their fiction; by re-examining some of their most popular works through the lens of recently discovered biographical data, I believe my analysis fills a gap in the scholarship on Cheever, Dickey, and postwar American literature.⁷⁰ Central to my interpretation is the fact that both Cheever and Dickey struggled throughout their lives to understand their own same-sex desires, and both used their fiction as a space in which to work through their conceptions of sexual orientation. This chapter will focus on Cheever’s 1964 short story “The Swimmer” and Dickey’s 1970 novel *Deliverance* in order to explore each writer’s examination of environmentalism in a culture of malaise and sexuality in a culture of repression.⁷¹ Both narratives are examples of what Linda

⁶⁹ I explain the distinctions between first, second, and third nature at length in my introduction.

⁷⁰ I freely admit that my methodological approach in this chapter violates the edict still upheld by many literary scholars that an author’s biography should hold no sway over our interpretations of his or her texts. I follow Lawrence Buell in the belief that it is impossible to ever fully disregard an author’s biography from literary analysis: “...biographical facts and inferences affect literary scholars whether they admit it or not, and rightly so. Sexual orientation is an obvious example. It cannot help affecting most people’s readings of the work at hand to think that Thoreau might have been gay, or that Emily Dickinson might have had lesbian tendencies. The question becomes, to what sort of rereading does this possible fact point us?—not, can it be bracketed?” (312-23). At the same time, however, I do not want to diminish the richness and possibility of interpretation by suggesting that literary texts are merely the products of authorial intention or biographical facts. Thus, I consider biography to be a significant tool in interpreting literary works, but I am also attentive to the idea that literary works develop out of a complex matrix of literary, discursive, cultural, and ideological conventions.

⁷¹ “In attempts to keep the narrative straight, containment of communism with containment of atomic secrets, of sexual license, of gender roles, of nuclear energy, and of artistic expression” (Nadel 5).

Wagner-Martin calls “the exploration-of-self through exploration-of-river that images a peculiarly American, masculine quest for identity” (114). By examining the homogenization of the natural world, particularly the containment of wild rivers in “The Swimmer” and *Deliverance*, I posit that these works seek to grapple with the psychological trauma that accompanies both environmental and sexual repression.

Cheever and Dickey link postwar malaise to a culture that represses both first nature and human nature, the two of which are often intertwined in the metaphorical, political, and personal logics of their fiction. The backyard swimming pools in Cheever’s “The Swimmer” and the man-made lakes in Dickey’s *Deliverance* represent sanitized, domesticated versions of the natural world. For the middle classes, these simulacric representations of the natural world often replace interactions with the actual natural world, and thus nature, once denaturalized, becomes what Michel Foucault has called the “heterotopic site” (26)—a space that falsely creates a sense of intimacy with the natural world despite the fact that it is a highly controlled, commodified, and even contrived environment. Additionally, both Cheever and Dickey employ contained waters in metaphorical systems representing the malaise of the middle and upper middle classes, and both juxtapose these metaphors of containment with images of wild, free-flowing rivers, which represent freedom from repression.

Considering these works in conjunction is not merely speculative on my part. The biographers of Cheever and Dickey demonstrate repeatedly that the two men were acquaintances and that they knew one another’s work intimately. Additionally, one of Dickey’s poems was published in the July 18, 1964 issue of *The New Yorker*, in which “The Swimmer” was first published. In fact, Dickey’s poem, “The Escape,” actually breaks up Cheever’s story, appearing on the third page of its seven-page spread. Despite the likelihood that Dickey would have read

this story, which quite literally surrounds his poem, and despite the narratological similarities of “The Swimmer” and *Deliverance*, no scholarly study has ever paired these two writers or their works.⁷² Literary critics have not only overlooked the connections between Cheever and Dickey, but they have also generally examined their fiction less often and with diminishing favor in recent years. This disregard is largely because their work often defies easy categorization. Cheever’s style, for instance, is marked by a blending of poetic devices and prose as well as a blending of the fantastic with the actual. Moreover, Cheever cannot be placed within the confines of New England literature or the overtly political literature of the postwar generation. Additionally, his reputation, both past and present, is inextricably linked with *The New Yorker*, because during the postwar period he published approximately 130 stories there, a feat that has been matched only by John O’Hara (Collins 6). Some critics associate *New Yorker* fiction with an apolitical worldview, and some writers for *The New Yorker* have been accused of being what R.G. Collins calls “apologists for their middle-class readership” (3). Moreover, as James E. O’Hara says, Cheever was “damned by the success associated with consistent publication in that magazine: to be a *New Yorker* writer was to be safe, acceptable, and predictable—all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding” (123). Similarly, classifying Dickey is also difficult as his poetry and fiction defy many of the schools that prevailed during his career; for instance, Dickey’s work rarely adheres to the tenets of the Beat, the New York, the deep image, the confessional, or the Black Mountain schools (Suarez 2-3). Because critics in the late 1960s and 1970s began to

⁷² Cheever’s “The Swimmer” has been compared to Dante’s *Inferno* (Kozikowski 368), Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” (Slabey 180), T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (Meanor 120), F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (Allen 292), the history of Ponce de Leon (Blythe and Sweet 557), the myth of Narcissus (Baily 315), and the myth of the River Lethe, the Underworld River of Forgetfulness (Cervo 49). Dickey’s *Deliverance* has been compared to Dante’s *Inferno* (Endel 615), John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (Wagner 107), Mark Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Wagner 112; Entzminger 98), Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (Meyers 192; Butterworth 77; Marin 111; Hart 449), Nathaniel Hawthorne’s “Young Goodman Brown” (Marin 111), and Eliot’s *The Wasteland* (Blair 213). However, the narrative antecedent that *Deliverance* may resemble most is Cheever’s “The Swimmer.”

equate modernism with conservatism and postmodernism with liberalism, many did not know how to classify Dickey given that he made very deliberate attempts to break with modernism while also adopting a relatively conservative worldview.

Ultimately, this difficulty in shoehorning Cheever and Dickey into particular categories has led some critics to dismiss the artistic and socio-cultural relevance of their work. Until recently, for example, critics have not examined adequately these writers' roles as serious twentieth-century environmental thinkers. Regarding Cheever, critics have paid too much attention to the archetypal and mythological qualities of "The Swimmer," while ignoring the environmental materiality and cultural close-mindedness to which the story responds. Regarding *Deliverance*, critics have focused too much attention on the novel's rape episode and not enough on the rape of the natural world. In short, both Cheever and Dickey are deeply invested in the ways in which socio-cultural changes affect the environment and the ways that alterations in the environment affect society and culture; however, both Cheever and Dickey often employ complex environmental metaphors that serve the dual function of examining simultaneously environmental and socio-cultural issues.

Environmentalism in a Culture of Containment

"The Swimmer" chiefly follows Neddy Merrill, a middle-aged, upper-middle-class man living in an affluent suburb (or "exurb," as Cheever often called it) of New York. This story is set in the communities of Shady Hill and Bullet Park—the locations of much of Cheever's fiction—which are modeled on Cheever's own community of Ossining, New York (O'Hara 67). After a rather dull morning of leisurely drinking and swimming at an acquaintance's pool, Neddy decides that he can "reach his home by water" (603) if he swims from pool to pool through the

entire eight-mile stretch of suburbs that lie between his present location and his house. Neddy envisions himself as a “pilgrim, an explorer, a man with a destiny,” and he imagines that his journey home via a “river” of swimming pools will be a significant “contribution to modern geography” (603-4). As Neddy makes his way through a seemingly endless series of suburban swimming pools, the reader discovers that everything in Neddy’s life is not as perfect as it had initially appeared. Neddy engages in several conversations with the owners of the pools in which he uninvitedly swims, and through these conversations, the reader slowly learns that Neddy has lost his wealth and some unexplained tragedy has befallen his two daughters. Out of a fierce subconscious desire for self-protection, Neddy has lost his grasp of time and consequently his perception of his own history. The narrator asks, “Was his memory failing or had he so disciplined it in the repression of unpleasant facts that he had damaged his sense of truth?”(607). When Neddy finally reaches the end of the “river” of swimming pools, he finds that his house is uninhabited and his family is nowhere to be found.

Cheever began writing “The Swimmer” in 1963 after finishing his second novel *The Wapshot Scandal* (1964). At the time, he was deeply interested in mythology, and he intended to “rewrite Bulfinch” in a series of short stories (qtd. in Bailey 315). In particular, Cheever was fascinated by the myth of Narcissus and employed it in this new short story as a way to explore psychological repression and, as I will demonstrate in greater detail in the second part of this chapter, homosexuality. While most of Cheever’s stories took him only about three days to write, “The Swimmer” took him two months, during which time he agonized over the narrative (Donaldson 211-2). Cheever ultimately completed the story by gleaning the most salient details from a manuscript that had swelled to exceed 150 pages (Collins 7). In an interview, Cheever describes his struggle to finish the story: “It was growing cold and quiet. It was turning into

winter. Involuntarily. It was a terrible experience, writing that story. I was very unhappy. Not only I the narrator, but I John Cheever, was crushed” (qtd. in Bailey 316). Despite the opacity of Cheever’s rhetoric, we can reasonably assume that the source of this devastation was the fact that he realized just how much of himself he had written into his protagonist, particularly his concerns over being open about his sexual orientation in his conservative suburban community. According to O’Hara, “this story comes closer to mythologizing the outward signs and inner turmoil of suburban life than any other by Cheever. Its protagonist, Neddy Merrill, is instantly recognizable as a member of the same unhappy crew that Cash Bentley [“O Youth and Beauty”], Johnny Hake [“The Housebreaker of Sandy Hill”], and Francis Weed [“The Country Husband”] had earlier joined: the disaffected males of Cheever’s suburbia, lost souls tortured by their unsatisfying existence in early paradise” (67).

One important development that sets “The Swimmer” apart from the many other similar narratives of “disaffected males” in Cheever’s oeuvre is that for the first time Cheever explores suburban malaise through an ecocentric perspective. Two possible catalysts in Cheever’s own life may explain this turn toward emphasizing a character’s interactions with the natural world and the way such interactions affect his thinking. First, Cheever himself was an avid swimmer and he swam not only in the pools of his affluent community in Ossining but also in nearby rivers. Cheever’s first major biographer Scott Donaldson notes, “For the sheer joy of exercise, nothing compared with swimming” (192). Additionally, during the early 1960s, when Cheever’s alcoholism was steadily growing out of control, he became an enthusiastic hiker, often walking the countryside around his home in the afternoons as a way to put off the desire for his first drink of the day. The landscapes around his Ossining home afforded many picturesque routes, but Cheever was fondest of a path that led along a dam on the Croton River (Bailey 296). Cheever

seems to have been mesmerized by the 180-foot-tall dam, particularly in the spring when it would overflow. Cheever often took visitors to see the dam, and, according to Donaldson, he measured the worth of a guest by his or her reaction to the dam: “Anyone who was excited by the dam overflowing was all right, John said” (355). This detail is telling in that it suggests Cheever’s elation over the water that is able to crest the top of the dam and flow freely once more. A similar desire is clear in “The Swimmer” as Ned resents the containment of water in pools and instead chooses to think of them as rivers. This aversion to containment, which becomes social as well as environmental, is pervasive throughout both “The Swimmer” and *Deliverance*.

Like “The Swimmer,” much of *Deliverance* was inspired by a strong fascination with rivers. The novel tells the story of four middle- or upper-middle-class suburbanites from Atlanta—Ed, Lewis, Bobby, and Drew—who endeavor to take a canoe trip down a river in north Georgia before it is dammed to facilitate a hydroelectric reservoir and a new “industrial complex” (275). Lewis Medlock, a camping and archery aficionado, exhorts the other three men to go on the trip, because he suspects that an atomic apocalypse will soon cause the world’s machines to fail, returning the planet to a pre-modern, pre-industrialized state. Lewis imagines that southern Appalachia still exists in such a state, so he believes the river trip will better prepare the men for the apocalypse, since living in suburbia has rendered them “lesser men” (47). The novel is told from the perspective of Ed Gentry, a moderately successful adman, loosely based on Dickey himself. In the end, after Lewis breaks his leg in a whitewater accident, after Bobby is raped, and after Drew is murdered on the river by two unknown mountain men, Ed must take control of the situation and lead the remaining party to safety.

In a recent essay, Bronwen Dickey describes how her father's fascination with rivers led directly to the writing of *Deliverance*:

"I think a river is the most beautiful thing in nature," my father wrote in one of his journals, right before the novel was published in 1970. "Any river is more beautiful than anything else I know." He was drawn to writers who felt similarly inspired by water, like Melville and Conrad. Heraclitus's philosophy of universal flux and his famous dictum, "you cannot step into the same river twice," particularly moved him. But there were few things that terrified my father as much as man's ever-growing intrusion into the natural world. (39-40)

Bronwen Dickey explains that her father's anxiety over the loss of wild rivers stemmed from a more general apprehension about the global loss of first nature. Dickey believed that in order for humans to attain a healthy perspective on ecology they must first "be in contact with nature as it was made by something else than men" (qtd. in Bronwen Dickey 40). The desire to be "in contact" with natural hydrologies and untouched ecosystems led Dickey to become an outdoor enthusiast; and his desire to be "in contact" was particularly acute while he was working as copy writer for an Atlanta ad agency in the early 1960s. During this period, Dickey frequently went on canoe trips with two friends: Al Braselton, the son-in-law of Bill Neal, who was a partner at his agency, and Lewis King, who, unlike Braselton and Dickey, was an avid fisherman, experienced canoer, and seasoned woodsman (Hart 243). In order to escape what biographer Henry Hart calls "the death-in-life of advertising" (242), Dickey made several canoe trips with Braselton and King down the Chestatee, Coosawattee, Toccoa, and Chattahoochee Rivers during the summers of 1960 and 1961.⁷³

⁷³ Although the Chattooga River was a major inspiration for the novel and later became the setting of the film, the men never actually ventured down the Chattooga because they considered it too dangerous.

Dickey undoubtedly had water legislation in mind when he began writing *Deliverance*. The Cahulawassee River in the novel is based on two rivers in north Georgia, the Coosawattee River and the Chattooga River, both of which were threatened during the 1960s with damming projects and hydroelectric plants. Christopher Dickey, James Dickey's son, says,

Most Southern cities are, to all intents and purposes, new metropolises created by and helped to create the new middle-class in the region after World War II... The river my father used to canoe in search of the wild in the early 1960s, the Coosawattee, is now mostly submerged beneath a lake, while its upper reaches and its main tributary, the Cartecay, are lined with housing developments. (28)

The events of *Deliverance* are probably most directly inspired by Dickey's experiences on the Coosawattee. A large-scale flood-control dam was built on the river between 1962 and 1974, and a large section of the river was turned into a lake (Hart 248). Prior to the creation of this dam, Dickey and his two companions decided to make one last trip down the Coosawattee, because, according to Hart, they wanted to experience "pristine wilderness" while it still existed in this country (248). When questioned about the lake in a 1995 interview, Dickey was still troubled by such degradation of first nature; he said, "'Progress,' so called, can be a dreadful thing" (qtd. in Hart 451).

Philip Slater, in *The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point* (1970), asserts that "The suburbanite, above all, dwells in cultural deprivation, in a synthetic environment, with neither the beauty and serenity of the countryside, the stimulation of the city, nor the stability and sense of community of the small town" (9). In Cheever's and Dickey's narratives, first nature, or "the wild," is often imagined by suburbanites as an escape from or

corrective to their malaise. Additionally, in both narratives, rivers and the wilderness are juxtaposed with contained waters and homogenized, domesticated landscapes. Thus, the impoundment of the nation's waterscapes reflects the characters' perceived imprisonment in suburbia. As escape, suburban recreation, often performed in the natural world, becomes, according to Keen Butterworth, "a 're-creation' of the life of his distant ancestry—tribal, or even pretribal, man. The routines, the manners, the trivialized human encounters of modern life—these are the price we pay for our deliverance from the terrors of primal chaos" (74).

"The Swimmer" directly links private swimming pools with the burgeoning leisure class in postwar America, a group that Cheever suggests is often desperately dissatisfied with life while also desperate to showcase the trappings of their newly acquired leisure status. In the story, Cheever is primarily concerned with exploring the social and psychological effects of dwelling in a culture of leisure and affluence, and he uses private pools as a symbol of this culture. Moreover, Neddy transforms these backyard swimming pools into a "river," which reflects his desire to break free of the malaise of the leisured class. In *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (2007), Jeff Wiltse describes the significance of pools in mid-century American consciousness: "Pools became emblems of a new, distinctly modern version of the good life that valued leisure, pleasure, and beauty. They were, in short an integral part of the kind of life Americans wanted to live" (5). According to Wiltse, in 1950 only 2,500 American families owned in-ground swimming pools. Later, though, as rising affluence and sprawling suburbs provided the means and the space, "One of the definitive symbols of the leisure class had suddenly become accessible to the middle class" (199). Thus, by 1970, almost 800,000 American families owned pools (201). Cheever's fictional communities of Shady Hill and Bullet Park reflect this broader national trend; yet for Cheever the pool becomes not only a

symbol of the emerging leisure class but also the confinement and repression Cheever associates with the suburban space.

In the opening paragraphs of “The Swimmer,” the third-person narrator, focalizing the story through Neddy’s perspective, denies the restrictiveness of suburbia: “His life was not confining and the delight he took in this observation could not be explained by its suggestion of escape” (603). Nevertheless, in 1977 Cheever confirmed that Neddy’s life, like so many of his characters’, was in fact marked by confinement, saying, “All my work deals with confinement in one shape or another, and the struggle for freedom”(qtd. in Collins 12). Furthermore, he notes that the three primary metaphors he employed throughout his career to represent confinement are “the small New England town, the world of affluent exurbia, and now prison. But of course, in our living we are also confined in the various emotional and erotic contracts we have formed, which one may regret, but which is difficult to find one’s way out of.” Although not immediately apparent to Neddy, this cultural claustrophobia is evident to the reader from the beginning of the story. Neddy’s life in the suburbs is devoid of any real significance, which is why the prospect of swimming through his neighbors’ pools makes him feel like a “man with a destiny” (604) and that it is “original and valorous to swim across the county” (609). Bored with the gathering at the beginning of the story, Neddy seeks escape by plunging into pool after pool and imagining that he has entered a mighty river: “To be embraced and sustained by the light green water was less a pleasure, it seemed, than the resumption of a natural condition” (604).

Neddy’s transition from what Stanley J. Kozikowski calls “bourgeois banality” (368) and the “suburban void” (374) into his more “natural condition” signifies his longing for the natural world. This particular representation of the natural world is, of course, highly ironic because the environment that Neddy experiences exists largely in his imagination. Although fantastic,

Neddy's journey resembles symbolically America's geopolitical project and the fabled history of Manifest Destiny and the colonization of the continent. Stephen C. Moore asserts, "The Cheever hero faces not the problem of the West, the frontier, the Indian, or the wilderness as it was stated and evoked in American writing of another time; the wilderness is now on the 5:42 for Bullet Park, the third martini, falling in love with the babysitter, the swimming pools across Westchester County" (33). Similarly, Robert M. Slabey states, "His journey takes him westward, that most American and symbolic of directions. Neddy, however, faces not the primitive forces of the wilderness but pools, gardens, and highways" (185).

Slabey contends that Neddy's swim signifies an urban/suburban repackaging of Emerson's advice to "enjoy an original relation to the universe" (185). Eugene Chesnick also explores the extent to which Cheever is an heir to the New England Transcendentalists' investment in developing a heightened sensory awareness: "With both Thoreau and Cheever immersion in water indicates full sensory vitality. Leander's cold morning bath [in *The Wapshot Chronicle*] is the ritual equivalent to Thoreau's dip in Walden pond" (125-6). However, Cheever's ironic evocation of the Transcendentalists is the result of increasingly ambiguous notions of American pastoralism in postwar fiction: "Whereas earlier it might have been perceived as a form of salvation, now it is wrapped in irony, paradox, irresolvable conflict" (209). Karl describes the West in the Transcendentalists' imagination as "the wild"⁷⁴—"a place of absolute freedom, a contrast with civilization and its restraints" (211). The irony in "The Swimmer" is that by the early 1960s Frederick Jackson Turner had long since declared the "frontier" closed; and for approximately seventy years, many American had believed that the frontier was not only closed but even dead, except in the imagination, wherein it had been both nourished and distorted by memory and narrative. The frontier remains a highly romanticized

⁷⁴ See, for example, Thoreau's essay "Walking" (1862).

space in Neddy's imagination for all but the concluding lines of the story; then Cheever swiftly deconstructs the myth, implying that the boundary between repression and freedom, like the boundary between civilization and the natural world, has shifted so radically that the former has altogether displaced the latter.

Similarly, in *Deliverance*, Dickey juxtaposes a sanitized, affluent existence with a more adventurous and elemental one, and Dickey, like Cheever, emphasizes this juxtaposition by comparing contained and wild waters. The desire to encounter the natural world in its unspoiled and even primordial state is something that Dickey's characters describe as "get[ting] hold of middle-class householders every once in a while" (5). Like the pools in Cheever's story, the weekend vacation serves as a symbol of the characters' class in *Deliverance*; also like Neddy in "The Swimmer," the characters in *Deliverance* cling to these symbols of their leisure culture, hoping desperately to disrupt the complacency of postwar, suburban malaise. For Ed, this malaise is so acute that at times he finds it utterly debilitating; for instance, he says that he feels the "inconsequence of whatever" he does, and that he struggles with the enormous weight of lassitude," which involves "a sense of being someone else, some poor fool who lives as unobserved and impotent as a ghost" (18). Ed claims that his existence prior to the river trip is facilitated by a philosophy of "sliding," which involves "living *by* antifriction. It is finding a modest thing you can do, and then greasing that thing. On both sides. It is grooving with comfort" (41). To Lewis, the river trip is to serve as a necessary corrective to Ed's suburban complacency: "You've been steady. But when that river is under you, all that is going to change." Scott Slovic contends, "So, what the novelist sets out to explore in this narrative is the possibility that contact with nature—and people who live close to nature—might stimulate blasé suburbanites into a condition of *feeling*" ("Visceral Faulkner" 125).

Dickey himself imagined contact with the natural world as the best corrective to this malaise. Before embarking on the river trip that would serve as the catalyst for *Deliverance*, Al Braselton recalls Dickey articulating a perspective and employing rhetoric almost identical to Lewis's. According to Braselton, Dickey said, "Grab it, Al, risk it. Don't be content with the half-life of sliding through that greased chute of upper middle class America" (qtd. in Hart 245). A similar impulse grips all four of Dickey's suburbanites in the opening scene of *Deliverance*, as Lewis asserts, "This whole valley will be under water. But right now it's wild. And I *mean* wild; it looks like something up in Alaska. We really ought to go up there before the real estate people get hold of it and make it over into one of their heavens" (4). For Lewis, the *wild* is what is most significant, not the wilderness, and Lewis imagines wildness continuing to exist only in remote, sparsely populated locales such as southern Appalachia or Alaska. Bronwen Dickey recalls that her father was similarly interested in wildness:

My father didn't talk much about wilderness, it was "wildness" he was interested in. Wilderness, to him, was just an idea, a romantic falsification of nature rather than the untamed, untamable thing itself. Wildness was a place where man risked everything; it wasn't a theme park or a toy you played around with or a place you ventured into for thrills. It could kill you. The characters in *Deliverance* were prepared only for wilderness, and they found wildness. Wildness bites back. (39)

Leo Marx likewise asserts, "Whereas wilderness is a particular kind of place (one that exhibits no signs of human intervention), wildness is an attribute of living organisms that may turn up anywhere" (20). In *Deliverance*, the river's potency, according to Lewis, exists because the river is "wild," a condition he argues will change as soon as the river is dammed and the surrounding area is made civilized enough for human habitation.

The idea that the natural world should serve as an escape from and corrective to the tedium of civilized life exists more broadly in postwar American culture and is encapsulated in many pieces of mid-century environmental legislation, such as the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the Wild and Scenic River Act of 1968. Given that Cheever and Dickey were both outdoor enthusiasts and that they were both drawn in a neo-romantic way to spiritual connections with the natural world, they would most likely agree with Congress's motivation for preserving the natural ecologies and hydrologies of many of the nation's wilderness spaces and rivers. However, neither Cheever's story nor Dickey's novel contains any characters who are clear advocates for environmentalism.⁷⁵ While both narratives lack the overt environmental message expressed in other works of the period (for example, the fiction and non-fiction of Edward Abbey, whom I will discuss in my next chapter), they do imply rather veiled affirmations of environmental policy. In "The Swimmer," Neddy's entire journey revolves around the reassertion of the wildness of a river; in other words, Cheever suggests something is fundamentally unsatisfying about contained waters, and through Neddy's imagination, he envisions a hydrology that is un-dammed and unrepressed. While the freeing of these contained waters occurs successfully in Neddy's imagination, he fails to perceive the larger ramifications that could result from such an environmentally engaged imagination.

⁷⁵ In the film version of *Deliverance* (1972), which was also written by Dickey, Lewis does become a clear mouthpiece for the environmental movement. In the opening of the film, the audience hears a voiceover of the four characters discussing the damming of the river, while seeing footage of the construction of a large-scale dam. In this scene, Lewis states, "You push a little more power into Atlanta, a little more air-conditioning for your smug little suburb, and you know what's going to happen? We're going to rape this whole landscape. We're going to rape it!"

Several critics have discussed the notion that the characters are grossly flattened in the film adaptation of *Deliverance*. For instance, Robert F. Wilson, Jr. states that while "Ed is the hero of the novel, the typical hero of American fiction who, like Huck Finn or Nick Adams, finds his fate is tied to a river," Ed lacks the depth of character in the film to be a compelling hero. Dickey did, though, create a very different type of hero, an advocate of environmentalism, in the character of Lewis (52). Lewis's efforts toward environmental justice, however, are undermined by his complete disregard of social justice, namely his contempt toward Appalachian natives.

Deliverance, despite its characters' ambivalence toward conservation, had a tremendous impact on hydropolitical debates concerning the Coosawattee and Chattooga Rivers, and Dickey utilized his own experiences with hydropolitics in cultivating the environmental orientation of the novel.⁷⁶ Several critics and scholars have noted that Bobby's rape parallels the figurative "rape" of the flooded valley and its displaced inhabitants. For example, Betina Entzminger states, "The novel links these hillbillies to their natural setting; they are, in a sense, violated nature responding with violation. The violation the mountain men enact is a violent homosexual rape, suggesting that modern man has raped the land and is now suffering nature's retribution" (99). Theda Wrede makes a similar argument in her recent article "Nature and Gender in James Dickey's *Deliverance*: An Ecofeminist Reading": "Although their special connection to the environment does not exonerate any crime committed, it elicits our admiration, and, in this light, one may argue that the violence the city dwellers encounter deep in the woods, as atrocious as it is, equals self-defense and merits a place within the context of social justice" (188).

In a letter to Edward Abbey, Dickey makes clear his vested interest in environmentalism and environmental justice:

I have just read Down the River—I have an especial interest in rivers—and I thought I would write you that, for whatever it's worth, I am solidly with you as

⁷⁶ In addition to the Coosawattee, the second river that Dickey transformed into the setting of his novel was the upper Chattooga River, which during the mid-twentieth century was threatened at least four times with hydroelectric projects. During the 1960s, opposition to these projects was intense, and in 1969 Congress appointed a special task force to work with the U.S. Forest Service to determine whether the Chattooga should be included in the National Wild and Scenic River System. Dickey was deeply involved in this debate and may have set his novel in this location to reflect his desire to preserve the river. Despite the traumatic events that transpire in the novel and despite Dickey's demeaning stereotypes of southern Appalachian natives, the novel ultimately succeeded in highlighting the debate over the damming of the Chattooga and galvanizing opposition to the project. As a direct result of the novel (1970) and the film adaptation of it that followed (1972), the number of visitors to the river grew from a few hundred a year in 1970 to over 50,000 in 1974 (Williams par. 5). Bronwen Dickey says, "Despite the river's dangers—or maybe because of them—the lower Chattooga quickly became one of the most popular whitewater destinations in the country; in the past two decades, over a million people have floated it. The fever may be gone, but there's no question that the mystique of the *Deliverance* river endures" (34). At least in part because of Dickey's support and the massive number of visitors his novel inspired, Congress ultimately voted to include more than 50 miles of the upper Chattooga in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

an ecologist and a human being, but most especially as a writer... My own ecological battles are nothing like so strenuous or eloquent as yours, though I did what I could to get the Chattooga River put on the Wild and Scenic Rivers list, and so not damned [SIC] up, as was the river in Deliverance, and I have taken a few public stabs against various mill and other 'development' projects in the area where I live... Anyway, though my credentials as a conservationist are not really impressive, I am with you a thousand percent in spirit, for what, as I said earlier, it may be worth. (*The One Voice, 1970-1997* 380)

Readers must keep in mind that, despite their many similarities, Ed diverges from Dickey in several important ways; in particular, Ed's reaction to and treatment of the natural world is often antithetical to Dickey's own. Dickey did not intend his readers to construe Ed as an environmental hero; rather, if we interpret his character through the lens of environmental justice, we should severely critique Ed. Throughout the novel, Ed uses the natural world solely for his own ends; for example, he uses it to overcome his malaise, his sense of inconsequence, and his feelings of masculine inferiority. Then, at the end of the novel, he abandons the natural world, and in buying a house on a man-made lake, he casts a vote for a domesticated version of the environment. With this gesture, Ed condones the exploitation of the natural world by buying into environmental colonialism and by advocating the domestication of the wilderness in the attempt to placate suburbanites' malaise.

Cheever's and Dickey's approaches to the idea that the natural world functions as a corrective to the restrictions of civilized existence re-inscribe a long-standing dialogue in American literature and intellectual history between the wilderness and pastoral motifs. Wrede

explains these competing tropes in the context of American environmentalism, and she examines the role these tropes have played in the colonial impulses present in American intellectual history:

While especially the wilderness trope figured strongly in American environmentalism, the pastoral, critics point out, has foremost provoked a destructive disparity between collective imagination and real landscapes. The wilderness, diametrically opposed to civilization, represents pristine nature, whereas the pastoral is the product of human ambivalence toward wild nature and the need to transform it. (179)

Wrede's conception of the pastoral and wilderness motifs is largely informed by Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (1964). Marx's project in this book is principally to demonstrate the ways in which "the pastoral ideal" has been used throughout American history to formulate national identity, to explore humans' relationship with the environment, and, in some cases, to protect the natural world and, in others, to justify its exploitation.

Marx defines two types of pastoralism: the sentimental and the complex.⁷⁷ Sentimental pastoralism, which Marx generally associates with popular culture, is characterized by an urban desire to flee the city: "An inchoate longing for a more 'natural' environment enters into the contemptuous attitude that many Americans adopt toward urban life (with the result that we neglect our cities and desert them for the suburbs)" (5). Sentimental pastoralism often manifests itself in the activities of the leisure classes: "in the piety toward the out-of-doors expressed in the

⁷⁷ According to Marx's history of the pastoral, Theocritus may be the first poet to work in the pastoral mode, but Virgil, especially in his *Eclogues*, is the most influential classical exponent of the pastoral mode (19). Marx's interest in pastoralism is less focused on formalism than that of many other scholars; instead, Marx uses "the pastoral mode" to indicate rather broadly "the contrast between two worlds, one identified with rural peace and simplicity, the other with urban power and sophistication."

wilderness cult, and in our devotion to camping, hunting, fishing, picnicking, gardening, and so on” (5). In addition, these activities serve both as recreation and a “re-creation” of imagined and, in most cases, romanticized tribal and pre-tribal human histories (Butterworth 74). The sentimental pastoral “gives rise to a symbolic motion away from centers of civilization toward their opposite, nature, away from sophistication toward simplicity, or, to introduce the cardinal metaphor of the literary mode, away from the city toward the country. When this impulse is unchecked, the result is a simple-minded wishfulness, a romantic perversion of thought and feeling” (9-10). Marx further explains that the “withdrawal from society into an idealized landscape is central to a remarkably large number” of canonical American texts (10); however, while many works of literature are motivated by the sentimental impulse, the best of them do not fall prey to the pitfalls of the sentimental pastoral (10). Marx categorizes most canonical literary texts as belonging to “complex” rather than sentimental pastoralism. He distinguishes works of complex pastoralism because they “do not finally permit us to come away with anything like the simple, affirmative attitude we adopt toward pleasing rural scenery... [T]hese works manage to qualify, or call into question, or bring irony to bear against the illusion of peace and harmony in a green pasture” (25). Artistic works of complex pastoralism often utilize the image of the “green pasture,” a landscape that can either be a wild space (first nature) or a rural space that is cultivated for the purpose of agriculture or animal husbandry (second nature). Importantly, the “green pasture” must become “a symbolic repository of meaning and value” that is disrupted by the introduction of a “counterforce,” which, in complex pastoral works of literature, usually manifests itself in the form of a machine (363). These machines—often trains for Marx—demystify and deconstruct the “symbolic repository” of the romanticized pastoral space. In other words, “Complex pastoralism ... acknowledges the reality of history” (Marx 363).

In “The Swimmer” and *Deliverance*, elements of sentimental and complex pastoralism coexist; the former is generally associated with the characters, while the latter is subtly implied by the authors’ narrative constructions and ideological examinations. Additionally, both authors, if not their characters, make an implicit argument for the necessity of interacting with the nonhuman environment, either in its natural or domesticated state. In Cheever’s story, the wild has already been domesticated and Neddy desires to render it untamed once again, while in Dickey’s novel, the wild is on the brink of domestication and, despite his characters’ ambivalence, the reader can discern in the narrative voice a desire to preserve first nature. At the same time, however, the characters in both narratives seem to possess and symbolize impulses similar to what Wendell Berry has called “environmental colonialism”: “Industrialism prescribes an economy that is placeless and displacing... All along ... it has been the same story of the gathering of an exploitative economic power into the hands of the a few people who are alien to the places and the people they exploit” (24-5). Thus, through the colonialism of their characters and the implied environmentalism of their authors, both narratives maintain a constant tension between the desire to dominate and the desire to preserve the natural world.

This tension permeates “The Swimmer,” and Cheever carefully demonstrates in Neddy a distinct colonialist impulse, which, at times, is environmental and, at other times, is cultural. Neddy’s environmental colonialism is evident in the fact that he imagines himself to be “a pilgrim [and] an explorer” (604), and with a “cartographer’s eye” he believes that he “had made a discovery, a contribution to modern geography; he would name the stream Lucinda after his wife.” During Neddy’s “voyage” (605), the story’s narrator also employs the rhetoric of cultural colonialism, and Neddy betrays prejudices common to the colonialist’s sense of cultural superiority, especially as he encounters the “natives” on his way down the river. This is apparent

as Neddy crosses the most “difficult portage” of his journey—the public pool of Lancaster—during which he seems uncomfortable because of his class distinction (608). Neddy believes that the public pool will in some way “contaminate” him: “Neddy remembered the sapphire water at the Bunkers’ with longing and thought that he might contaminate himself—damage his own prosperousness and charm—by swimming in this murk, but he reminded himself that he was an explorer, a pilgrim, and that this was merely a stagnant bend in the Lucinda River” (608).

Neddy’s fond memories of the Bunkers’ pool actually have little to do with his concerns over the purity of the water. The narrator pays almost no attention to the water in the original description of Bunkers’ pool. In reality, Neddy fears class contamination rather than bodily infection from the unclean water of the public pool. Neddy’s reaction to the public pool confirms Wiltse’s analysis of the broader middle-class desire to privatize swimming pools because of a fear of public pools’ “socially unrestricted waters” (193); Wiltse posits that the rise of private pool construction corresponds to “middle-class Americans’ desire to recreate within more socially selective communities. Private pools enabled Americans to exercise much greater control over whom they swam with than was possible at public pools. Joining a club pool [or “Installing an at-home pool”] ensured that other swimmers would be of the same social class and race” (182-3).

During the early 1960s, at the same time that the upper classes retreated from those othered by class or race, the “persistent pastoralism” of these privileged white Americans led to an obsession with native, pre-industrialized peoples: “For these books, in one way or another, circle around to Indian forms of existence as ways of responding to the very qualities that civilization is proud of quieting” (Karl 212). This conflict between distancing and romanticizing the native other is apparent in Neddy; while he pursues forms of recreation that enable him to recreate, in the words of Butterworth, “the life of his distant ancestry—tribal, or even pretribal,

man,” Neddy’s sense of superiority precludes him from associating too closely with the “natives” whom he deems below his “station.” Thus, Neddy can perform the rites of the native and thereby tap into a purportedly bygone version of himself, while still retaining physical and psychic distance from the native other.

Dickey’s *Deliverance* also contains elements of both environmental and cultural colonialism. The back story of the novel—i.e. the damming of the river to facilitate cheap hydroelectricity for an industrial complex—reflects Berry’s notion of the logic of an environmental colonialism fueled by an industrial economy that is both “placeless and displacing” (24-25). Like the TVA-inspired electrical company that dams this region of southern Appalachia, the characters in *Deliverance* also reflect Berry’s environmental colonialism. They refer to themselves as “pioneers” (80) and imagine themselves, like Neddy, to be explorers in search of a truly “wild” place. Lewis, in particular, is often interpreted as the embodiment of humans’ desire to dominate the natural world. Many critics, including Rosemary Sullivan, Susan A. Spencer, and Casey Howard Clabough, have linked Lewis’s character to the idea of the frontiersmen in R.W.B. Lewis’s *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (1955). Moreover, Barnett Guttenberg argues, “In his will to dominate, Lewis is part of the devitalized society which dams the river; he, too, stops the stream of primal energy. His overriding will must be broken before he can join Ed in a right relation to nature” (84).

Ed’s “right relation to nature,” throughout *Deliverance*, is debatable. When the men first set out on the river, Ed never feels “civilized” (76) in the natural world. The first time that Ed says, “We were civilized again” (76), occurs after the men pass an industrial chicken-processing plant that is polluting the river with trash and animal byproducts. This is not the first time on the

river that the men have seen signs of human habitation and cultivation. Prior to encountering the processing plant, the men had floated past a farm. However, Ed associates civilization not with the farm but rather with the processing plant and the pollution in the river. If the farm represents the garden, then the factory represents the machine in the garden, and ironically it is the latter that Ed finds comforting. Ed does not begin to feel fully at ease with the natural world until the men set up their camp; after pitching their tents and, in effect, creating a small city on the edge of the river, he says, “I felt a good deal better; we had *colonized* the place” (83, emphasis added).

Like Neddy in “The Swimmer,” Ed condescends to the “natives” he encounters, and when discussing the “red-neck South” (38) he asserts that “Nobody worth a damn could ever come from such a place” (55). Also, like Neddy, Ed and his companions desire a link to a native, tribal version of themselves, all the while maintaining a differentiating divide between themselves and the actual natives they encounter. While Ed does implicitly lament the environmental degradation of southern Appalachia later in the novel, he never mourns the culture that is displaced by the construction of the dam. To Ed, the flattening of regional diversity is fundamentally a boon for society, and he seems to welcome the eradication of the “natives” and the homogenization of southern Appalachia. Building upon Mariana Torgovnick’s *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellects, Modern Lives* (1990), Daniel Cross Turner explains that contemporary uses of primitivism or primitivist discourse pursue two fundamental but contradictory goals: either “the primitive can suggest a deep spiritual drive to reach a level of primal transcendence,” or the primitive “offers a form of escapism and can degenerate into a set of chauvinistic cultural clichés that ‘create a never-never-land of false identities and homologies’” (162). The South, Turner argues, has been subjected to a great deal of primitivist discourse, because “Southern culture has thus served as a kind of reptile brain or Jungian shadow

for America in general, especially the Northeast, which has typically equated the southern *backwoods* with a profound and irreparable sense of cultural *backwardness*” (163). Additionally, Rodger Cunningham argues that the Appalachian South “exists in a blank created by a double otherness—a *doubly* double otherness. For the region is not only an internal Other to the South as the South is the internal Other of America, but it is also the occupier of a simultaneous gap and overlap *between* North and South” (45). Dickey’s deployment of primitivist discourse reflects the desire for transcendence and the tendency toward chauvinism. The latter is informed by the double alterity of the Appalachian South; and, as I will explain, the former is informed by the Southern Agrarians.

As I demonstrated relative to Robert Penn Warren in the last chapter, Dickey’s analysis of humans’ relationship with the natural world is also inextricably bound to agrarianism, particularly the brand of agrarianism propagated by the Fugitive-Agrarians during the early 1930s. After World War II, Dickey studied both literature and anthropology at Vanderbilt University. While there Dickey was exposed to the Vanderbilt literary and social-scientific tradition of agrarianism and became interested in the debate between agrarianism and industrialization. Donald Davidson was the only Agrarian still at Vanderbilt when Dickey was there, although he later served as Andrew Lytle’s assistant at the University of Florida (*Self-Interviews* 33, 35) and became a close friend of Robert Penn Warren (Hart xviii). Dickey says that when he arrived at Vanderbilt the debate between industrialism and agrarianism “was no longer a burning question, but it was still in the air” (*Self-Interviews* 34). Consequently, Dickey steeped himself in the writings of the Fugitives and Agrarians. In particular, he was fascinated by *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930), which in his 1968 *Self-*

Interviews, he claimed “is still very powerful.”⁷⁸ However, according to Dickey the best book of the Fugitive-Agrarian oeuvre was Davidson’s *The Attack on Leviathan: Regionalism and Nationalism in the United States* (1938). Dickey describes its significance to him:

Davidson points out that you belong to a specific time and place where you can see the same things and a certain number of the same human beings every day. He says this is far from chauvinistic. This is the way human beings were meant to live. This is the way they can root down into a place and develop their own way of life in harmony with the environment... I’m really convinced of the truth and necessity of what Davidson points out: that differences give richness and variety to life and offset the terrible monotony that we’re drifting toward in Americanizing the whole world, where eventually there won’t be anything but a supermarket culture. (35)

For Dickey’s Atlanta suburbanites, this “supermarket culture” is already ubiquitous, and, as a result, they must imagine a more extreme catalyst for change than Davidson’s regionalism.

Early in *Deliverance*, as the men are driving toward the river in north Georgia, Ed and Lewis spend much of the trip discussing the possibility of nuclear annihilation. Although little critical attention has been paid to *Deliverance* in the context of nuclear proliferation, the novel is marked by an undercurrent of atomic anxiety. Dickey himself was particularly fixated on this issue, because during World War II, he witnessed the bombing and subsequent destruction of Nagasaki in 1945 (*The One Voice, 1942-1969* 96). On one hand, Ed and Lewis’s conversations

⁷⁸ Dickey continued to rely on the philosophical platform of the Agrarians, particularly its environmental facets rather than its social conservatism, throughout his career. After receiving an honorary degree from Appalachian State University in 1993 (which Dickey claimed was his fifteenth such degree), he delivered a speech in which he “harked back to the Agrarian’s warnings about science’s devastating effects on the natural environment... Modern culture, according to [his] mystic view, was comparable to the atomic blast, obliterating nearly all signs of life’s fundamental mystery” (Hart 726).

exemplify post-1945 Cold War America's anxiety about a nuclear warfare-induced apocalypse. On the other hand, these conversations are uniquely southern, because Lewis's fascination with post-apocalyptic life is informed by Dickey's own fascination with agrarianism. While Dickey's characters represent the alienated work force of an industrialized society, they cannot conceive of achieving the agrarian dream via a rededication to an agriculturally based society; instead, Lewis believes the only way an agrarian society would ever be possible again in the South would be if some apocalyptic nightmare, such as the dropping of an "H-bomb" (44) occurred, resulting in humanity's return to a more elemental, sustainable existence in southern Appalachia.

Lewis says, "I think the machines are going to fail, the political systems are going to fail, and a few men are going to take to the hills and start over" (42). Later, he asks, "Where would you go when the radios died?" (44). This question alludes directly to Andrew Lytle's contribution to *I'll Take My Stand*. In perhaps the most evocative moment of his essay, "The Hind Tit," Lytle entreats southerners to abandon mass-produced commodities in order "To avoid the dire consequences and to maintain a farming life in an industrial imperialism... Throw out the radio and take down the fiddle from the wall" (244). Besides Davidson, Lytle seems to have had the greatest impact on Dickey's shaping of *Deliverance*.⁷⁹ In Lewis's imagination, southerners, so long inundated by popular culture, are no longer capable of destroying the proverbial radio; therefore, Lewis envisions an apocalyptic scenario through which the choice is negated, the radio dies, and the people of the South head back to the hills and begin anew in a more elemental existence. Lewis's vision culminates in a distinctly agrarian philosophy as he tells Ed how he would live after the fall of society and the return to the land: "If everything

⁷⁹ In a 1954 letter to Lytle, Dickey says that he wrote a poem entitled "The Farm" that was dedicated to Lytle and that was about Lytle's land being flooded by the TVA. After a description of this poem, Dickey writes, "There will be no powers to intrude and destroy what is between us, Andrew, for our courses have run far and deep enough together to be proof against anything" (*The One Voice 1942-1969* 225-226).

wasn't dead, you could make a kind of life that wasn't out of touch with everything, with the other forms of life. Where the seasons would mean something, would mean everything. Where you could hunt as you needed to, and maybe do a little light farming, and get along. You'd die early, and you'd suffer, and your children would suffer, but you'd be in touch" (44).

Unlike Lewis, Ed hates the rural South and repeatedly demeans Lewis's romanticization of agrarianism. Ed's analysis of the pastoral is more critical even than is typical of Leo Marx's complex pastoralism. Thus, Ed labors under an anti-pastoral impulse, which he employs to deflate the myths and idealizations that Lewis propagates. He says: "You'd think that farming was a healthy life, with fresh air and fresh food and plenty of exercise, but I never saw a farmer who didn't have something wrong with him, and most of the time obviously wrong; I never saw one who was physically powerful, either. Certainly there were none like Lewis" (56). While Ed's condescension toward mountain natives often seems anti-agrarian, Dickey may still be upholding the agrarian platform in these passages. Wrede notes that "Ed is struck by how many disabling accidents spring from rapacious modern machinery" (186). Furthermore, Wrede argues that the industrial chicken-processing plant that the men encounter on the river represents the "colonizer-colonized relationship" between the outsiders and insiders of southern Appalachia. The industrialists exploit native populations by offering jobs that pollute their landscapes and render their "traditional occupation of subsistence farming all but obsolete... They find themselves having to ingest not merely the filthy water but also, figuratively speaking, a dominant culture that destroys their ties to a traditional life and denies them the boons of contemporary culture" (187-8). This problem, Dickey implies, will be exacerbated exponentially as cheap hydroelectric power draws industries that will further exploit the natural resources and cheap labor pools available in the area.

However, Ed champions neither the city nor the country, neither the industrial nor the agricultural. Throughout the novel, Ed appears uncomfortable in and dissatisfied with every environment he encounters: the city, the suburbs, the uninhabited wilderness, the factory, and the rural agricultural landscape. In Ed's worldview, the tensions between the urban and rural as well as between the pastoral and wilderness motifs are made manifest. Ed detests the vulgarity of the city and the malaise of suburbia, yet he still maintains the notion that wilderness areas in rural Appalachia are places to colonize in order to make them fit for human habitation. Such ambivalence is largely informed by Dickey's own complex and, at times, contradictory perceptions of modern life. For instance, Hart notes that "Dickey admitted that he had one foot planted securely in the Agrarian Old South and the other in the New South of commerce and industry, that he was torn between reactionary and progressive ideals" (254). Dickey struggled with what he called his own "schizophrenic existence" (qtd. in Baughman 71), and above all, he longed to reconcile these facets of his experience. Although Ed consistently misses the point, Dickey seems to suggest that the only way for this reconciliation to occur is to recognize and appreciate the inextricable links between social and natural ecologies. As Davidson and Lytle suggest, the local human community, in order to be vibrant and thriving, must become part of a native, natural ecology.

According to Donaldson, this distinction between the social and natural ecologies of a particular place is also an important theme in many of Cheever's stories, particularly the "The Swimmer":

But no one who lives that disconnected life, one foot on Madison Avenue and the other in Westchester or Connecticut, manages to stay happy for long. His daily commutation, by means of technologically wonderful highways and railbeds, only

take him on a fruitless circular voyage. He stays in motion, and goes nowhere but down. He comes home to roost, but can sink no roots... Neddy Merrill is symptomatic of the restless and rootless denizens who inhabit Cheever's fictional suburbs. (144)

In Neddy, we see the romantic yearning for the wilderness, and his life before his fantastic voyage down a river of swimming pools represents what Donaldson calls "the rootlessness and artificiality of contemporary life" (151). In the end, both Cheever's and Dickey's assessment of their characters' rootlessness is bleak. For Ed, in the perennial battle between the desire to preserve and the desire to colonize the natural world, the latter impulse inevitably wins. For Neddy, the domestication of the natural world is so complete that a reversal seems impossible, and for him an encounter with the wild can transpire only in the imagination. Additionally, after he restores the contained waters back to a free-flowing river, his immediate impulse is to re-colonize the space.

The contained waters of Cheever's "river" of swimming pools and Dickey's hydroelectric reservoir are crucially important in interpreting the narratives because they represent the sublimation of humans' instinctual, animalistic nature. This sublimation, Freud maintains, is one of the primary functions of civilization, because it curbs humans' innate desires for unchecked sexuality and aggression. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), Freud puzzles over the fact that so-called "civilized" people often tend to idealize and romanticize simpler and even "primitive" cultures: "How has it happened that so many people have adopted this strange attitude of hostility to civilization?" (68). Freud suggests that the tendency for humans to assume that past civilizations enjoyed a more fulfilling existence reflects a deep-

seated discontentment, and he speculates that such discontentment stems from the fact that as civilizations advance they tend to become increasingly repressive.

Similarly, Carl Jung has argued that the rise of civilization corresponded directly to an ascent of the rational mind and a diminution of the instinctual. This process results in a distinction between the human and nonhuman worlds, thus rendering humans separate and, according to Lynn White, Jr.'s famous assessment of Judeo-Christian logic, dominant over all other facets of the natural world. Butterworth notes,

Under the intimidating light of modern civilization, we hide our shadow, our instinctual selves, not only because we distrust it, but also because John Locke and the Enlightenment have convinced us that it does not exist. The Puritan/Manichean ethos has taught us to project it conveniently elsewhere—as the devil, or on some darker complexioned race. Yet from time to time we feel the Aurignacian Man lurking just beneath our skins, and that scares the devil out of us; so we turn him out, or push him back deep into the recesses of our psyches, where we will not have to face his reality at close hand. (70)

Moreover, Turner argues that while the ethos of Western culture tends to exorcise the instinctual, people often still maintain a desire to connect with a more essential culture, particularly if they feel that they are suffering under an “excessive civility” (165). These contradictory impulses exemplify the tension between the urban and the rural/wilderness as well as between the modern idealization of progress and the romantic revulsion against civilization. Fredric Jameson explains that this tension is an “ideological double standard” that balances “the disorder and anarchy of individual violence and of human nature in general” with the “need for Leviathan, or the authoritarian state” (“The Great American Hunter” 182). Cheever and Dickey both exploit

the tension of this ideological double standard in their narratives, but ultimately for them the metaphor of contained waters functions in very different, if not wholly antithetical, ways.

Cheever explores several types of repression in the character of Neddy. First, Cheever explores subconscious psychological repression. Patrick Meanor argues that the ending of “The Swimmer” parallels the conclusion of T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”: “We have lingered in the chambers of the sea/ With sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown/ Till human voices wake us and we drown” (122). The delusional fantasy world in which Neddy dwells crumbles when, as for Prufrock, human voices force recognition to penetrate his psychological repression. Cheever also explores certain behavioral repressions mandated by the rules of social decorum. According to O’Hara, “the dead weight of a Calvinist heritage figured heavily in Cheever’s own upbringing... And beyond question, the theme of Puritan-style guilt and mortification informs many of Cheever’s better stories...” (31). For instance, when Neddy first begins his journey, he is unable to enjoy fully the natural world (or rather its artificial representation): “To be embraced and sustained by the light green water was less a pleasure, it seemed, than the resumption of a natural condition, and he would have liked to swim without trunks, but this was not possible, considering his project” (604). Bound by the mores of a culture that disapproves of nudity and disparages the eroticization of non-human materiality, Neddy cannot attain the level of intimacy with his environment that he so craves. As mentioned previously, Cheever asserts that his fiction principally explores “confinement,” particularly the “various emotional and erotic contracts” placed upon the individual by society (qtd. in Collins 12). The one time on his journey that Neddy does swim naked is in the Hallorans’ pool. The Hallorans are suspected Communists; therefore, because they are already so far outside the

normative order of Cheever's suburbia, Neddy feels comfortable violating this facet of his community's self-regulation.

In his analysis of *Deliverance*, Butterworth links self-reflection to an intimate knowledge of the environment, contending that Dickey's characters, as well as the novel's readers, are "subdued creatures of an urban-industrial civilization, separated from Nature—save our own; and that nature-in-ourselves we cannot understand because of our isolation from the natural world which could furnish the analogies necessary for understanding" (70). If people truly knew themselves, Dickey seems to suggest, then they would realize that they are not far from the animal kingdom, not far from the wild with all of its freedom as well as its violence. Dickey uses the damming of the river and the sublimation of its primordial power as a metaphor for the sublimation of humans' instinctual, animalistic nature. While this sublimation often induces malaise in suburbanites, Dickey also suggests that it is imperative for civilization. After killing the man who attempts to rape him earlier in the novel, Ed slips out of the confines of his previous normative psychological order in a way similar to Kurtz's in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899). Having drawn blood for the first time, Ed immediately engages in violent and sadistic fantasies. He imagines cutting off the genitals and head of the man he has just slain, and he even considers eating him (200). Then, apparently in a fit of blood lust, Ed contemplates killing his friend Bobby as well (201-2). Ed must struggle for the remainder of the narrative to check his violent impulses as he continues down the river, closer to human civilization and farther from the "wild."

In interviews and letters, Dickey has articulated his own experience of the tension inherent in Jameson's ideological double standard. For instance, in a 1973 interview, Dickey said that *Deliverance* is "a story of how decent men kill" (qtd. in Glenday 157), by which Dickey

means, according to Michael K. Glenday, the violence necessary for “the maintenance of civilized values, suggesting once again that Gentry’s survival exemplifies and enforces those values, that they are implanted in his character and exert their ascendancy even at the most critical moments” (157). Furthermore, Linda Wagner-Martin contends that if we interpret *Deliverance* as a story of masculine initiation, then the novel can be read as a “gothic, even bitter, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*... Just as Dickey’s comments on the seemingly pastoral life are scathing in their satire ... so his notion that civilization *has* brought humanity pervades” the novel’s conclusion (112). Additionally, in a letter Dickey wrote to his editor before the publication of the novel, he says that he wanted the reader to discern that “the narrator without his knowing it, has been a monster all his life, a born killer as well as an ‘ordinary suburbanite’” (qtd. in Hart 441). Therefore, according to the logic of the novel, humans are often, if not always, monstrous in their appetites for violence and sex. While interactions with the natural world function to energize these appetites, civilization serves as a necessary force of repression that counterbalances the wild.

Despite many parallels between Cheever’s story and Dickey’s novel, the conclusions of these two narratives provide very different ways of viewing humanity’s interaction with the environment and represent very different relationships to the idea of repression in general. In “The Swimmer,” nature, even in such a surreal representation as a “river” of swimming pools, provides Neddy with an escape from the malaise of suburbia and the trauma of his economic and familial downfall. For Neddy, civilization, not nature, inspires a self-reflection that foils the escape he had so briefly obtained. Although this self-reflection leads Neddy to (re)discover certain sublimated facets of his own psyche, the reader remains unsure of what repressed information Neddy has confronted. In *Deliverance*, the wild provides Ed with an escape from

the malaise of his suburban existence, and when he returns, he says that the river “is always finding a way to serve me, from my archery to some of my recent ads and to the new collages I have been attempting for my friends” (276). However, this sense of optimism at the end of the novel is largely misleading, for what Ed fundamentally lacks is self-reflection. While Ed ultimately overcomes his monstrous desire for violence, he fails to confront and interrogate in any substantive way his repressed desires. Despite Dickey’s own insistence on being alive (Fraser 125) and going “very deeply into life, not just brush[ing] along the surface of it…” (“Self-Interviews” 175), *Deliverance* presents an implicit argument not merely for balance and control but also for repression. At the end of the novel, Ed and Lewis buy houses on a man-made lake, not the lake that was created by damming the Cahulawassee, but another “dammed lake” on the other side of the state. Contentment for these characters stems not from the urban center or the undisturbed wilderness but rather, as in the final scene, from a man-made, hydroelectric lake, which represents a balanced, albeit fabricated, space that is simultaneously wild and domesticated. But why does Dickey make this argument given that he hoped to save wild rivers? Does the novel argue for a perspective between the interpretation that nature is a wild, vital force to which humans long to return and the interpretation that the novel justifies the maintenance of civilization by supporting the city center and denigrating the wild?

Critics have largely ignored the symbolic significance of the lake at the end of *Deliverance*; for example, Glenday, while examining liminal spaces “between city and wilderness” in the novel, neglects to consider the lake (154). This oversight is significant because lakes are fundamentally important symbols in the novel, and they provide important keys for interpreting Ed’s character and Dickey’s overarching argument. If one were to interpret the conclusion of the novel as optimistic and take the “deliverance” of the men seriously, one

could see the man-made lake as representing the blending of these two locales, city and country, a liminal space that seemingly provides for Ed the best of each. One could then speculate that Ed derives more from the man-made lake than Neddy does from his artificial space, because the lake is closer to first nature than a “river” of swimming pools. Finally, one could conclude that Ed’s domesticated version of the natural world provides a liminal space between suburbia and the wilderness, thus partially fulfilling his longing for first nature, while assuaging the inherent tension between the desire to preserve and the desire to colonize. However, this interpretation, while tempting, is not accurate, if one considers the pervasive examination of repression that is embedded throughout the novel. If the free-flowing Cahulawassee River represents the wild and the dam on the Cahulawassee represents the restricting mores of society that subdue humans’ instincts and desires, then the lake represents a liminal space between two polar opposites. In other words, the dam is the river’s antithesis, not the lake as most critics have argued. The river, after all, is still present in the lake; it flows into and through the lake, moving constantly yet unobserved below its surface. Like the lake, *Deliverance* often resists strict binaries, instead seeking out a space between the wild and domesticated.

Furthermore, one can read both “The Swimmer” and *Deliverance* as iterations of what Joseph Campbell calls “the great myth” or “the monomyth.” In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), Campbell describes the monomyth as “a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return” (qtd. in Eisiminger 53; see also Endel 612 and Hart 449-50).⁸⁰ Marx argues that Americans’ conception of pastoralism, particularly sentimental pastoralism, is a variant of the monomyth that storytellers and authors have been utilizing for centuries (228). Cheever’s and Dickey’s narratives follow very similar trajectories,

⁸⁰ Dickey has confirmed on more than one occasion that he was largely inspired to write *Deliverance* after reading a review by Stanley Edgar Hyman in a 1949 issue of the *Kenyon Review*. In the review, Hyman discusses Joseph Campbell’s *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Eisiminger 53; Endel 612; Hart 449-450).

and both can be interpreted as pastoral monomyths. However, both stories diverge from Campbell's culminating stage; while Neddy and Ed do ultimately end up back at home, neither return is "life-enhancing." Cheever and Dickey's narratives undercut the possibility of a life-enhancing return by asserting an ironic twist on the monomyth, and we see in both narratives a trajectory of confinement, false liberation, and, ultimately, repression. In Dickey's novel, the continued repression of the characters' desires parallels the damming of the river. In Cheever's story, the reversal occurs; Ned converts a series of contained pools into a wild river, but only in his imagination. Neither Ed nor Neddy achieves his desired deliverance; at the end of both narratives, all waters remain contained and all desires remain repressed, although perhaps still alive below the surface.

Sexuality in a Culture of Containment

According to his biographers, Cheever experienced both heterosexual and homosexual longings from the time of his early childhood, and Cheever's journals record that he had many same-sex fantasies and some experiences throughout his adolescence. Cheever even acknowledges that he was expelled from Thayer Academy during his junior year of prep school for being gay, in particular for seducing the son of a teacher (Donaldson 36-9).⁸¹ Cheever's wife Mary suspected that her husband may have been bisexual from the beginning of their relationship; however, she says that the idea really took hold after she saw the original Broadway production of Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and empathized with Blanche as Blanche recalls her deceased, gay husband (Bailey 162). However, according to Scott Donaldson, Cheever harbored negative feelings about homosexuality as well, and his

⁸¹ Cheever was not always consistent about the reasons for his expulsion. Over the years, Cheever claimed that he was expelled, not for being gay, but rather for poor academic performances and for smoking (Donaldson 36-39).

inability to accept his own bisexuality may have stemmed from his Calvinist heritage, his “Puritan-style guilt” (31), and his parents’ severe revulsion to homosexuality (42). Cheever’s struggle to understand his own sexual orientation continued for most, if not all, of his life, often resulting in extreme bouts of depression. In 1963, he wrote, “Here is some sort of conflict ... a man who has homosexual instincts and genuinely detests homosexuals” (qtd. in Bailey 5). This conflict nearly led Cheever to suicide in the early 1960s, and by the mid to late 1960s, he consulted psychiatrists repeatedly about his bisexuality and even attempted conversion (Donaldson 201, 219, 249-50). His guilt and conflict also seem to have caused at least occasional impotence as well. Particularly when attempting to have sex with his wife during this period, Cheever could rarely achieve orgasm (Bailey 391). When Cheever appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1964, he says his greatest fear was that the public would learn that he was “impotent [and] homosexual” (qtd. in Bailey 331).

Although he remained conflicted about his sexuality⁸² and although he stayed married to his wife from 1941 until his death in 1982, Cheever increasingly pursued same-sex relationships throughout his life. Perhaps the most significant of these relationships was with the American composer Ned Rorem. Their affair first occurred at the Yaddo artists’ colony in Sarasota Springs, New York—a place that offered Cheever a sense of freedom that he often lacked while at home in Ossining. Although they initially met in 1964, Cheever’s sexual relationship with Rorem did not begin until 1966, at which time Cheever was comfortable approaching him because Rorem had recently published a candid account of gay culture entitled *The Paris Diary* (Bailey 395). The affair with Rorem was one of the most open relationships with a man that Cheever had ever experienced, and for him it represented a significant sense of release. Cheever’s biographer

⁸² To his psychologist, he reported that “Walking down Fifth Avenue, he wasn’t sure whether he wanted to look at men’s or women’s behinds” (Donaldson 250).

Blake Bailey writes, “With Rorem’s assistance, Cheever ascended those stairs [his euphemism for an orgasm] three or four times a day, and his long struggle with impotence was nowhere in evidence” (396). Rorem later said of his affair with Cheever, “[He] was obsessed with homosexuality as though hoarding lost time” (qtd. in Bailey 396). Despite Cheever’s euphoria at finally experiencing such freedom, he remained ambivalent about the affair. Rorem recalled that at times Cheever wanted to make their affair public and at other times he was crippled by the thought of how the news would be received by the straight community (Donaldson 227).

Although late in life Cheever was often more open about his bisexuality, he never fully came out to his friends and family. His lifelong secrecy was largely due to the repressive culture in which he found himself. Cheever’s friend, the playwright Arthur Laurents, describes the effects of this repression on Cheever: “He wanted to be accepted as a New England gentlemen, and New England gentlemen aren’t gay. Back then you had no idea of opprobrium. .. [Y]ou were a second-class citizen if you were gay, and Cheever did not want to be that” (qtd. in Bailey 132). Until the end of his life, Cheever remained concerned about the prospect of facing the close-minded gossip that he imagined would follow his emergence from the closet. For example, in the late 1970s, Cheever said, “And so what I seem to be afraid of is the voice of the world... ‘Have you heard? Old Cheever, crowding seventy, has gone Gay. Old Cheever has come out of the closet’” (qtd. in Bailey 575). Cheever’s fears about the way this news would have been received by his acquaintances proved prescient. After his death, many of his friends and neighbors around Ossining found the news of his sexuality upsetting, and some even insisted that they would have spurned him socially had he admitted his orientation to them (Bailey 667). As a result of this repressive culture, Cheever remained in the closet except with a few friends and lovers. However, in his fiction, Cheever repeatedly addresses the issue of his own sexuality.

Many critics and readers have overlooked this facet of Cheever's work. Yet, much evidence suggests that homosexuality is not only featured throughout his oeuvre but that it is one of the most prominent issues that his work explores.

During the mid 1970s, a graduate student from Duke University named Dennis Coates often visited Ossining to interview Cheever as part of his dissertation research. One day Cheever read Coates a story entitled "The Leaves, the Lion-Fish, and the Bear." According to Donaldson, "Here, for the first time in his fiction, Cheever overtly suggested that homosexual love might well occur within the context of a normal marriage, and with healthy consequences" (280). After reading the story, Cheever took Coates on a walk to the Croton Dam, during which he made a sexual advance toward Coates. When Coates politely declined the offer, Cheever said, "I'm no hard-core homosexual... I don't even know what they do. All I know is it opens up a wonderful world of love" (qtd. in Donaldson 281). Coates then inquired about the strains of homosexuality present in Cheever's fiction. He asked, "It's been in your work all along hasn't it?" to which Cheever responded "Of course it has... It's always been there, for all the world to see" (281).

Cheever's serious exploration of sexual orientation in his fiction has often gone unnoticed by literary scholars. For example, James E. O'Hara argues that "Homosexuality is rarely mentioned in Cheever's work prior to *Falconer* (1977)" (60). However, O'Hara, like so many critics, fails to realize that in earlier texts, such as "The Swimmer," Cheever addresses sexual orientation but had to do so obliquely because of the pervasive culture of repression that prevailed even at liberal publications such as *The New Yorker*. Additionally, Donaldson argues that Cheever often treated homosexuality both in his fiction and his interviews with humor, which allowed him to address the issue in a seemingly lighthearted way, while also precluding further investigations of his own sexuality (43). Donaldson, like O'Hara, fails to notice that "The

Swimmer,” although darkly humorous at times, earnestly considers the issue of sexual repression.

Dickey’s sexual history is surprisingly similar to Cheever’s. Like Cheever, Dickey was married and had children, all the while retaining a lifelong obsession with homosexuality (Hart 597). Although Cheever undoubtedly accepted and acted upon his bisexuality more willingly than Dickey, Dickey’s extra-marital philandering was just as infamous as Cheever’s. Also, while Dickey may not have had as many male partners as Cheever, many credible sources corroborate accounts of Dickey’s same-sex desires and experiences. The primary difference between the two men is that while Cheever increasingly came to terms with his bisexuality, Dickey continually repressed his sexual orientation. Biographer Henry Hart notes that regarding homosexuality Dickey “seemed as stymied as his characters” (169-170).

Always eager to shock an unsuspecting listener in conversation, Dickey was fond of admitting that he had tried having sex with men, although he was unlikely to label himself bisexual. For instance, in 1960 he told his canoeing partner Al Braselton, “Well, I’ve tried men... Yeah, I tried it one time, just to see what it was like... It was no good. Sex with men is no good. A very poor substitute for women. Very poor. I don’t recommend it” (qtd. in Hart 252). Al Braselton determined that Dickey’s same-sex experience most likely occurred during World War II while he was in the military. There is some doubt, though, that Dickey had only an isolated homosexual experience up to this date. According to Hart, “Many other men, including his son Chris, witnessed or glimpsed his sexual ambiguity” (252). Hart also argues that “For Dickey, homosexuality was a natural expression of the innate affection between men or between

men and boys” (252). Hart’s biography of Dickey is replete with situations in which Dickey at least propositions, if not consummates, sexual relationships with various men.⁸³

Dickey, who has often been disparaged by critics because of his conservatism, seems in some ways more comfortable around openly gay men than Cheever ever was. Hart notes that Dickey “relished the company of his gay friends” (433). For example, once while Dickey was visiting the poet Richard Howard and his lover, Howard noticed that Dickey obsessively inquired about their living arrangements, and that Dickey often flirted openly with Howard’s gay friends (433). Shortly after the meeting with Howard and his lover, Dickey insinuated to a student, Ben Greer, that he saw bisexuality as a viable sexual orientation: “ain’t nothing that says you can’t have it both ways” (448). Dickey’s relative comfort with gay culture, as compared to Cheever’s discomfort, may simply stem from the likelihood that his bisexuality remained largely repressed and therefore less threatening to his coveted reputation as a southern gentleman of letters. By the mid to late 1990s, however, Dickey became more open with his friends and family about what he called his “imps of the perverse” (qtd. in Hart 741), by which he meant his alcoholism, bisexuality, and sexual sadomasochism. His friend Jim Mann says that during a conversation in the summer of 1995 Dickey presented contradictory opinions of homosexuality, at once claiming that people who admit their homosexuality were heroes, while at the same time saying that he experienced “a sense of revulsion” when he considered having sex with a man. Hart writes, “What revolted him when sober, however, had often titillated him when drunk” (741).

Dickey and Cheever actually met in March of 1965 at a reading at the Library of Congress featuring Cheever and Reynolds Price. The event was arranged by Dickey, who was then the poetry consultant to the Library (Donaldson 220). Although this was the first time that

⁸³ For more examples, see in *James Dickey: The World As A Lie* (2000) the episodes involving Al Braselton (249), John Woods (296), Robert Peters (327), his male students at the State University at Postdam, New York (373), Stephen Sandy (388), Richard Howard’s lover (433), Ben Greer (448), Curt Richter (696), and Ward Briggs (709).

Dickey and Cheever had ever encountered one another, Dickey did not hesitate to question both Cheever and Price backstage about their masturbation habits. In a suggestively titled article, “James Dickey, Size XL” (1997), Price recalls the encounter and states that Dickey exhibited “an unabashed craving for all the news of human life” (31). Dickey’s quickness to ask about such intimate sexual matters may have stemmed not only from his “craving for all the news of human life” but also from his suspicion that both men possessed a certain sexual ambivalence. Although neither Price nor Cheever had yet publically acknowledged being gay or bisexual, Dickey seemed acutely interested in their sexualities. When asked by Cheever’s biographer Scott Donaldson for any information pertaining to Cheever, Dickey responded with a letter that focused solely on a party that followed the 1965 Library of Congress reading:

In [Cheever’s] demeanor, though, was something of the décor, if you know what I mean, of the aging homosexual. I was surprised to find that he was married, though I shouldn’t have been, for I have a couple of similar cases as relatives, and, though they have the same fastidious, slightly aggrieved manner, they also are married. You could feel some suppression in him, some kind of withdrawn and secretive thing, though this was not, at least to me, bothersome. Toward the end of his visit he grew very friendly, and at a party we gave before he left I was sitting on the floor talking to Reynolds Price, and I felt a hand on my head, and, when I looked up and saw that it was Cheever’s I was surprised; and then I was not surprised. But I liked Cheever, and like his memory, and at times I think he is a very good writer indeed. (*The One Voice* 405)

This “secretive thing,” which Dickey noticed in Cheever, was likely Cheever’s bisexuality. The second-to-last sentence of this letter is important, because here Dickey comes dangerously close

to revealing not only his suspicions about Cheever but possibly more than he was comfortable acknowledging about his own bisexual curiosity. Beginning the final sentence of this paragraph with the word “But” suggests that Dickey “liked Cheever” despite, not because of, his sexual orientation. Dickey’s seeming disapproval, however, may have been an act of self-protection, as he was never able to admit publically his own homosexual desires.

The narrative structure of Price’s “James Dickey, Size XL” reveals that Price may have also suspected that Dickey, like Cheever, possessed “some kind of withdrawn and secretive thing.” Before describing the events at the 1965 Library of Congress reading, Price first tells a story from 1969 about a party that he and Dickey attended at Peter Taylor’s house. Price recalls that Dickey “proceeded for no apparent reason to lift me suddenly off the floor (I weighed 175 pounds), carry me nimbly across the room, deposit me in an armchair and say, ‘I’ve never done so but if I were ever to sleep with a man, I’d want it to be either you or Ned Rorem’” (31). Dickey’s mention of Ned Rorem as the putative object of his sexual desire is particularly pertinent to this chapter’s argument. As mentioned previously, Rorem had been out of the closet since the publication of his memoir *The Paris Diary*, and he had a heated affair with Cheever in 1966. Dickey’s admission in 1969 of his own sexual attraction to Rorem links him both psychologically and sexually with Cheever. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate, Ed in *Deliverance* is based in part on Neddy in “The Swimmer,” and Neddy is based directly on Ned Rorem (Bailey 315-6). Thus the catalyst for both narratives, at varying degrees of remove, is Ned Rorem, the object of each author’s sexual fantasies, and the Ned/Neddy/Ed character becomes a symbol for the conflicted sexual fantasies that both Cheever and Dickey sought sometimes to liberate and at other times to repress. In both narratives, rivers and the wilderness are juxtaposed with contained waters and homogenized, domesticated landscapes. Thus, the impoundment of

the nation's waterscapes reflects the characters' that they are imprisoned in suburbia. As escape, suburban recreation, often performed in the natural world, becomes a vehicle to imagine and enact unrealized desires.

Because Cheever was deeply interested in Freudian psychology, he tended to equate homosexuality with narcissism, and he has said that he based his study of narcissism and sexuality specifically on Ned Rorem whom he fortuitously met at Yaddo while beginning to draft the story that would become "The Swimmer." (This was Cheever's initial meeting with Rorem, which occurred a few years prior to their affair at Yaddo in 1966.) Cheever's descriptions of Rorem as a beautiful and boyish middle-aged man are strikingly similar to his descriptions of himself in his journals of the time (Bailey 315-6); and he seems to have modeled the character of Neddy Merrill on both Rorem and himself, although Ned Rorem becomes his namesake. Significantly, Cheever here links his identity with that of an openly gay man in order to examine the social ramifications of alternative sexual orientations in his own repressive suburban community. In the story, Neddy loses everything he loves (his wife, his daughters, his fortune, and his home) for some unexplained reason. The reader sees Neddy repeatedly ostracized, but we never gain a clear idea why he is so shunned by his neighbors. Many critics have speculated about the source of Neddy's troubles but few have considered the possibility that Cheever intended Neddy to be read as a gay character. This critical oversight is understandable, given the scant amount of evidence in the story pertaining to Neddy's sexual orientation. However, there is one significant scene in the story that advances the interpretation of Neddy as a gay character. After Neddy begins to discern that he has been "losing his memory" and that he has a "gift for concealing painful facts," he becomes severely depressed (609). To alleviate his depression, he

visits the home of his former mistress. Once there, he thinks, “Love—sexual roughhouse in fact—was the supreme elixir, the pain killer, the brightly colored pill that would put the spring back into his step, the joy of life in his heart” (611). However, the sight of his mistress sitting by her pool fails to excite him sexually, and his sexual memories of her are not “profound.” Such sexual apathy toward this scantily clothed woman is suggestive, particularly since Neddy has just articulated the idea that sex is the best way to alleviate his depression.

Additionally, Cheever’s journals suggest that he may have intended Neddy to be a gay character. For instance, Cheever explains his initial reluctance to rewrite the Narcissus myth: “I would like not to do the Swimmer as Narcissus. The possibility of a man’s becoming infatuated with his own image is there, dramatized by a certain odor of abnormality, but this is like picking out an unsound apple for celebration when the orchard is full of fine specimens” (*The Journals* 187). At the end of this entry, Cheever rather enigmatically remarks, “With Pygmalion there is the need to dignify the situation, to make it urgent” (187). If the Pygmalion figure in this scenario is Cheever, then the object of his love is the object of his art: Neddy/Ned Rorem. Thus, “The Swimmer” enables Cheever to examine himself through Ned Rorem and to consider the social and economic ramifications of his bisexuality being suspected or confirmed in his community. The bleak conclusion of this story may explain why Cheever was reluctant throughout his life to disclose his own sexual orientation.

The history of *Deliverance* also intersects with Dickey’s sexual history. As mentioned previously, the novel was largely inspired and informed by Dickey’s own canoeing trips down the Chestatee, Coosawattee, Toccoa, and Chattahoochee Rivers with Al Braselton and Lewis King during the summers of 1960 and 1961. Particularly important is the trip down the Coosawattee the men took before the damming of the river to create Carter Lake. On the first

night of this trip, after setting up camp, Dickey got very drunk and made an aggressive but rather ambiguous sexual advance toward Braselton. Unnerved by Dickey's advance, Braselton slept outside the entire night, refusing to enter the tent with Dickey. Unsure about how far Dickey might take his advances, Braselton says, "I didn't want to be put in a position of having to fight him off. He's a big son-of-a-bitch and strong as a bull" (qtd. in Hart 249).

On the second day of this trip, the men split up. King took a car several miles downriver so that he could fish while waiting on Dickey and Braselton to canoe down to him. While preparing to fish the river, King was approached by two mountain natives, a father and son named Ira and Lucas Gentry, whose last name Dickey ironically gives to his protagonist Ed Gentry. Ira owned and operated an illegal whiskey still nearby, and he feared that King was an officer investigating the area. Despite King's attempts to assuage his worries, Ira remained skeptical and decided to wait with King to see if his partners showed up on the river. King readily agreed to wait with the Gentrys, because, although they were never overtly hostile toward him, the son was carrying a gun. When Dickey and Braselton finally arrived, the Gentrys were satisfied that King was not investigating their bootlegging operation, and they immediately became very friendly, offering the three Atlantans water and whiskey. Braselton states, "We never ran into any sadistic mountaineers. They were always friendly toward us" (qtd. in Hart 249).

From these rather simple events Dickey constructed the traumatic plot of *Deliverance*. Significantly, he and his companions never actually encountered any violent Appalachian natives intent on harming, much less sodomizing, unsuspecting city-dwellers. The only person on the excursion who actually demonstrated any sort of sexual aggression was Dickey himself. Therefore, the rapists in the novel may be based in part on Dickey's own conflicted desire to

sleep with Braselton on the first night of the trip. By projecting his own same-sex desires onto the supposed “savages” in the novel, Dickey is in effect exorcising a facet of his identity that he feared would be deemed socially unacceptable.

In “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Ed Gentry!” Betina Entzminger discusses the desire of white males of the postwar era to repress any “Dark Other” they may have possessed. Building upon Kaja Silverman’s concept of “reflexive masochism,” Entzminger asserts, “In the late sixties (as Dickey wrote *Deliverance*) when white male authority faced challenges from many formerly powerless groups—women, ethnic minorities, homosexuals—white males often turned against the Other within themselves” (108).⁸⁴ Furthermore, Entzminger expands upon Leslie Fiedler’s essay “Come Back to the Raft Ag’in, Huck Honey!” (1948), in which Fiedler famously argues that many canonical works of American literature, such as *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885), contain patterns of homoerotic attraction, especially when men leave the precincts of society and enter the wilderness. Thus, according to Entzminger, in *Deliverance* “The rape is a violent eruption of homosexual desire” (99). Since Bobby’s rape magnifies the latent but pervasive homoerotic desire that already permeates the early sections of the novel, the men’s response to this “violent eruption” of repressed desire is to reaffirm and reassert the culture of the repression from which they come. Therefore, Ed must kill the mountain man, who for him embodies the homoerotic impulses that he is striving to stifle (108). Additionally, the burying of the rapist deep in the woods and the subsequent (re)burial of the man and the entire landscape by the floodwaters reflect the men’s compulsion to repress their same-sex desires as much as possible.

⁸⁴ For a similar analysis, see Pamela Barnett’s “Rape and Repudiation, Masochism and Masculinity in *Deliverance*” (2003).

While Entzminger's argument is convincing, she neglects a few important factors. In particular, she considers only the characters' repressed homoerotic desires without ever considering the possibility that the characters are actually a reflection of Dickey himself. The story told by Braselton about Dickey's aggressive sexual advances while on their canoeing trip renders Dickey's own biography relevant to Entzminger's thesis. In addition to his characters, Dickey himself is a case study of "reflexive masochism," as he too was revolted by and sought to exorcise the "Dark Other" within himself. Moreover, the very existence of *Deliverance* as an attempt to work through his own sexuality demonstrates the impossibility of complete repression, and Dickey's biography, with its long catalog of homosexual propositions, further demonstrates this point.

Over the years, many critics have argued that Dickey's novel presents a misogynistic worldview, or rehearses what Carol Heilbrun has called "the woman-hating American dream" (59).⁸⁵ However, the notion that Dickey or his characters glorify men and the masculine while disparaging women and the feminine is not wholly supported by textual evidence. Dickey himself was often exasperated with critics—for example, Hilton Kramer—who argued that his novel was a machismo fantasy. Dickey states in a 1971 letter that this line of criticism is blatantly erroneous because the only character (Lewis) who entertains a machismo fantasy is bested by nature early in the novel (Hart 451). Furthermore, Hart argues that many feminist critiques of the novel are "misguided":

⁸⁵ In addition, Cecelia Tichi argues that "In the traditional canonical texts, males embark upon treacherous waters to face tests of physical and metaphysical courage... Whatever the thematic crux, the 'Big-Sea Waters,' the planet's open oceans, and the mighty Mississippi are represented as commensurate in importance with the trials of the American males for whom these waters comprise both staging area and *métier* of heroic struggle. One tends to equate water in American literature with an epic, male struggle. Melville's Ishmael in *Moby-Dick* speaks for all such texts in remarking that 'all rivers and oceans' offer 'the image of the ungraspable phantom of life.' It serves a masculinist ecology to identify the most physically energetic of waters as male" (6-7).

The novel focuses on men, but the focus is withering rather than celebratory. Women are marginalized, but Dickey allows one woman—Drew’s wife—to deliver a judgment that encapsulates much of the novel’s message: ‘Nobody can do anything. Nobody can ever do anything. It’s all so useless. Everything is useless. It always has been.’ She articulates the despairing existentialist point of view that the novel began with and returns to at the end. (452)

However, Hart is no defender of Dickey. He notes that Dickey himself could be sexist and that he often “indulged in a sort of woman baiting” (451). Despite this periodic sexism, though, Hart argues that Dickey’s characters do not advocate behaviors that are objectifying or degrading to women. In fact, Ed “despises graphic pornography” (Hart 453; *Deliverance* 20) and all four men on the canoeing trip remain relatively uninterested in or unaware of women.

On the morning that the men set out on their trip, Ed and his wife Martha’s farewell reveals an important facet of the gender dynamics featured in the novel. In this scene, Ed confesses to Martha his feelings of malaise: “It seemed like everything just went right by me, nothing mattered at all. I couldn’t have cared less about anything or anybody. If going up in the woods with Lewis does something about that feeling, I’m for it” (20). Martha responds by asking if she is the source of Ed’s dissatisfaction; he says that it is not her fault and then thinks, “but it partly was, just as it’s any woman’s fault who represents normalcy.” Hart contends that throughout the novel “Homosexuality is represented as appealing and repugnant, heterosexuality as consoling and boring” (450). While Dickey himself asserted that he preferred having sex with women to having sex with men, he also said that he preferred being friends with men (Hart 253). Braselton speculates that in *Deliverance* Dickey was exploring the possibility of a life wholly devoid of women: “In a way you can see this in the fact that *Deliverance* was basically

deliverance from women. The whole plot of *Deliverance*, even the homosexual rape ... [shows that] women are not necessary” (qtd. in Hart 253).

Therefore, rather than being a machismo fantasy or a celebration of misogynist values, *Deliverance* instead reflects an acute apathy toward women that is motivated by the characters’ and perhaps Dickey’s own subconscious homoerotic desires rather than by a deep-seated disrespect for women. What actually arouses these men is each other; however, that desire is displaced and projected onto the natural world, resulting in a tendency to sexualize and quite literally have sex with the environment. For example, in the novel, Lewis is said to not be interested in sex at all (8), and the only time that he seems remotely interested in his own sexuality is when he confesses that his first wet dream occurred in a sleeping bag (86), which may imply an arousal inspired by the natural world.

Ed, though, is the primary character in the novel who sexualizes the natural world, particularly during the scene in which he climbs the cliff in murderous pursuit of the mountain man who had attempted to rape him. During this scene, Ed converts two different but contrapuntal facets of the natural world into objects of sexual desire: the river and the rock face of the cliff. As the scene begins, Ed stands between the two, and his sexually charged rhetoric suggests standing between two lovers: “I stood watching the stream with my back to the rock for a few minutes, not thinking of anything, with a deep feeling of nakedness and helplessness and intimacy” (161). Then, after becoming “ultrasensitive” to the cliff and “feeling it more gently” and with “more tenderness” (163), Ed begins to scale the rock face. Soon, he experiences a coital moment that he describes as a “delicious sexual voiding like a wet dream” (164), after which he says, “I simply lay in nature, my pants’ leg warm and sopping with my juices, not cold, not

warm, but in a kind of hovering” (169). Later he describes his experience in even more explicit terms, saying he had “to make love to the cliff, to fuck it” (177).

Few scholars have examined these characters’ tendency to sexualize the natural world, particularly the scene involving Ed and the cliff. While critics of *Deliverance* have generally focused on Bobby’s rape, the rape of the natural world (through a sort of technocratic colonialism) and Ed’s sexual relationship with the natural world (which seems to be consensual and reciprocal) have gone virtually unnoticed. Additionally, the few scholars who have discussed the rape and sexualization of the natural world—such as Keen Butterworth, Theda Wrede, and Linda Wagner-Martin—have claimed that the environment in these encounters is feminized. Thus, scholars have propagated a traditional ecofeminist perspective, which can be defined, according to Patrick Murphy, as the patriarchal tendency to exploit nature and women as part of “a two-pronged rape and domination of the earth and the women who live in it” (87).⁸⁶ Regarding *Deliverance*, Wrede makes the clearest ecofeminist argument: “The gendering of subjugation and subjection—male dominance over a feminized landscape—makes Ed a participant in the destruction of the land and its human inhabitants” (190). While Wrede’s argument is intriguing, it generally does not work for an analysis of *Deliverance*. Neither Wrede, Butterworth, nor Wagner-Martin provides any textual evidence to support the idea that nature is feminized in the novel; instead, they simply assume that it is feminized because this is the typical line of argument in ecofeminist logic. While undoubtedly nature is often feminized in American literature, it seems heteronormative for ecocritical scholars always to assume that nature will be feminized when discussed by male writers.

⁸⁶ See also Annette Kolodny’s *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor As Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975) and “Unearthing Herstory: An Introduction” (1996) as well as Marx’s *The Machine in the Garden* (29).

Instead, in *Deliverance*, Dickey masculinizes the natural world, which, given Ed's sexualized engagement with the environment, should radically alter both ecocritical and queer interpretations of the novel. Wrede argues, "The metaphor of the land as female lover, a result of psychological projection, becomes one of the dominant images in the novel, fostering the hero's transition from figurative boyhood to manhood" (182). While Wrede is correct in her assertion that Ed's coupling with the natural world is a significant psychological projection, she may be inaccurate in positing that Ed imagines the land to be a "female lover." Several key passages in the novel suggest that Ed perceives certain facets of the environment—particularly the cliff and the river—to be male rather than female. During the scene in which Ed scales the rock face, he never assigns any feminine attributes or pronouns to either the cliff or the river. Usually, he employs gender-neutral language and uses the pronoun "it" rather than "she" or "he"; for example, he says that he had "to make love to the cliff, to fuck it" (177). However, when any gendered attributes are assigned, they are usually masculine rather than feminine. As he describes his struggle to scale the cliff, Ed says,

Then I would begin to try to inch upward again, moving with the most intimate motions of my body, motions I had never dared use with Martha, or with any other human woman. Fear and a kind of moon-blazing sexuality lifted me, millimeter by millimeter. And yet I held madly to the human. I looked for a slice of gold like the model's in the river: some kind of freckle, something lovable, in the huge-serpent-shape of light. (176)

In this passage, Ed says that his coupling with the cliff is more "intimate" than anything he has ever experienced with his wife or any other woman, which may suggest that he has experienced or at least fantasized about this "most intimate motion" with a man.

Furthermore, the golden eye reappears in this passage for the third time in the novel. The golden eye, a signifier of Ed's unsatisfied sexual desires, is an important key in understanding Dickey's exploration of sexual orientation. Ed first sees the golden eye in one of the models at his ad agency. While doing a risqué photo shoot, the model stirs in him "a deep and complex male thrill"; however, he is not particularly attracted to her in any way except for the fact that she has a golden eye (21-22). Ed next sees the golden eye projected onto his wife's back as they make love the morning before the canoe trip; they couple in a rear-entry position that some scholars have suggested insinuates Ed's homoerotic desire or, at the very least, parallels the subsequent later rape scene (Hart 448; Longen 138). Eugene M. Longen even states, "The contrast between the two acts of sex is even more sharply focused if one understands that it is anal intercourse that occurs between Ed and Martha. This understanding, however, is not strictly warranted by the text of the novel, though neither is it unwarranted" (footnote 2. on 138). In the text, Ed says, "in the center of Martha's heaving and expertly moving back, the gold eye shone, not with the practicality of sex, so necessary to its survival, but the promise of it that promised other things, another life, deliverance" (28). This is the only use of the word "deliverance" in the entire novel, and it suggests another life, one that may not involve women in any capacity. While having sex with Martha, Ed very well may be longing to have sex with a man, and he conflates this desire with the golden eye.

In the third appearance of the golden eye, it is again transferred to another object of Ed's sexual desire. In this case, the golden eye is located in the river, and Dickey links the river in this passage with a clear phallic symbol, a "huge-serpent-shape," which reflects not only Ed's homoerotic desire but also his perception that this desire as somehow sinful. Moreover, the symbol of the golden eye is likely an allusion to Carson McCuller's 1941 novel *Reflections in a*

Golden Eye. This novel was made into a major film in 1967, at which time Dickey was writing *Deliverance*. McCuller's novel and John Huston's film adaptation, like Dickey's *Deliverance*, explore the repression of homosexuality in the context of a heterosexual marriage. Similar to Ed, the repressed gay protagonist of *Reflections in Golden Eye* is described in the film as being "the square peg [that] keep[s] scraping about in the round hole rather than ... discover[ing] and us[ing] the unorthodox one that may fit it." Also, similar to Ed, the protagonist of *Reflections in Golden Eye* murders the man who has come to represent his homoerotic desire.

After seeing the golden eye in the river, Ed immediately begins to masculinize the river, and like Cheever, Dickey conflates homoerotic desire with narcissism: "It might have looked something like my face, in one of those photographs lit up from underneath. My face: why not? I can have it as I wish" (171). Many critics have noted the gravity of this moment; in particular, Barnett Guttenberg has demonstrated the significance of Ed's "beholding" rather than "seeing" once he reaches the top of the gorge: "Dickey's visionary moment, then, like Wordsworth's, involves the birth of the creative imagination and, through that, a conception of one's place in the natural world of vitality; the visionary moment thus becomes one of spiritual communion" (86-7). Other scholars, including Sue Walker and Casey Howard Clabough, have argued that Ed's merging with the natural world is similar to the desire of deep ecologists to experience the world sensually as advocated by Maurice Merleau-Ponty, David Abram, and others (86-7). Dickey, like Walt Whitman in "Song of Myself," reexamines the romantic notion of merging with nature by sexualizing what would otherwise merely be a sensual union with the environment. Dickey, though, unlike most romantics including Whitman, masculinizes the natural world while in the act of "beholding" and "merging" (171). Standing atop the cliff and looking down, Ed immediately begins to personify the river below, and the face that he envisions in the river is the

face of a man that resembles his own rather than the face of a woman. This becomes even more significant later on in the novel when Ed again has sex with the river, this time literally as well as metaphorically merging with it. However, in this instance, Ed is penetrated by the river rather than the other way around: “I felt the current thread through me ... up my rectum” (208). Entzminger argues, “If the (white) masculine body is that which possesses and penetrates, the black body, the female body and the homosexual body are to be penetrated and possessed” (109). In this scene, Dickey transforms Ed’s “(white) masculine body” into the “homosexual body” as it is penetrated by the masculinized river. Perhaps not surprisingly, Ed enjoys the penetration, claiming that the feeling is painful but “luxurious” (208).

The ironic tragedy in the conclusion of *Deliverance* is that there is no deliverance. The desired deliverance in the opening pages of the novel is from a repressive culture and, particularly for Ed, from an unfulfilling heterosexuality. At least on a subconscious level, Ed desires deliverance from women not because he is necessarily a misogynist but rather because the objects of both his companionship and sexual desire are generally men rather than women. Therefore, the conclusion of the novel is bitterly ironic rather than liberating. Ed experiences what Entzminger calls his “Dark Other,” but as he returns to “civilization,” his deep-seated reflexive masochism sublimates this facet of his identity. Despite this sublimation, though, the novel also suggests that repressed feelings do not always remain repressed. The murdered native men, like the outburst of homoerotic desire they represent, may not remain buried forever; after all, graves have been dug up and their secrets disinterred once already in the novel (266-7). The river, also an important symbol of homoerotic desire, has not entirely disappeared; a dam may have been erected, but the river still flows, but now just under the surface of a seemingly placid lake. Ed fails to grasp the likelihood that in one form or another repressed longings often

reemerge. Thus, in the end, Ed attempts to maintain the repression of his desires, and he returns to a life that is unfulfilling, a life without deliverance.

The contained waters of Cheever's "river" of swimming pools and Dickey's hydroelectric reservoir are crucially important in interpreting these narratives because they represent the sublimation of desire. Leo Marx argues that "today's advanced society may be singularly repressive. Can it be that our institutions and cultural standards are enforcing an increasingly painful, almost unbearable degree of privation of instinct?" (9). The characters in "The Swimmer" and *Deliverance* work to subvert this "privation of instinct" by engaging the natural world and, in the process, engaging their repressed desires. For Cheever and Dickey, water (both contained and free) provides a complex metaphorical system that demonstrates the reciprocity between cultural, sexual, and environmental repressions within the context of the 1960s. Moreover, I believe that some of Cheever and Dickey's significant works can and should be read as an elaborate, long-standing intertextual dialogue. In 1960, Dickey first published "Awaiting the Swimmer," a poem about a man awaiting his lover as she swims to him across a river. In 1964, Cheever published "The Swimmer," a story in which a man must swim a river to exorcise the memory of his sexual orientation. The story is fundamentally a parable of the trauma that may accompany the unrepressed in a culture of repression. In 1970, Dickey published *Deliverance* (1970), which explores the effects of shedding repression but also a novel that ends with a heartrending reassertion of repression. If these two writers remained aware of one another's work and this intertextual dialogue continued, then perhaps one could speculate that some of Cheever's later works such as "The Leaves, the Lion-Fish, and the Bear" (1974) and *Falconer* (1977) function as a direct address to Dickey and a sharp critique of *Deliverance*. In

these works, Cheever affirms and celebrates bisexuality, something Neddy, Ed, and Dickey himself remained largely unable or unwilling to do.

CHAPTER IV

Between Anarchy and Activism:

Edward Abbey's Radical Environmental Philosophy

“The land is the appointed remedy for whatever is false and fantastic in our culture. The continent we inhabit is to be physic and food for our mind, as well as our body. The land, with its tranquilizing, sanative influences is to repair the errors of a scholastic and traditional education, and bring us into just relations with men and things.”

- Ralph Waldo Emerson, “The Young American”

Throughout this dissertation, I have sought to demonstrate the necessity of studying post-World War II American fiction and cinema in conjunction with the rise of modern environmental activism and philosophy. Many scholars of environmental history argue that since 1945 Americans have become increasingly invested in humanity's relationship to and stewardship of the natural world, and therefore have enacted many unprecedented cultural and legislative changes during the postwar period. However, some environmentalists, both past and present, have considered these steps inadequate in curbing the degradation of the environment. The clash between reform environmentalism and radical environmentalism highlights the debate over

whether existing legal structures and democratic political paradigms can effectively quell the destruction of the environment. Since the emergence of Transcendentalism in the mid nineteenth century, radical environmental activism and philosophy have been propagated by many prominent American writers, including Emerson, Thoreau, John Muir, Mary Austin, Rachel Carson, and Wendell Berry. The most radical postwar environmental writer, though, is likely Edward Abbey. This chapter seeks to assess both the uses and limits of several phases of environmental philosophy and activism in Abbey's fiction and nonfiction as well as in his own life. Furthermore, I seek to define the effects of Abbey's radicalism on late-twentieth-century American environmentalism and American culture more broadly.

Even from an early age, Abbey demonstrated an abiding commitment to environmental protection. Born the son of a farmer and coal miner named Paul Revere Abbey in the Appalachian woodlands of Pennsylvania, Abbey became disgusted in his youth with the logging industry's decimation of his native region. Inspired by Woody Guthrie and Carl Sandburg, Abbey left Pennsylvania at seventeen, hitchhiking and jumping boxcars in order to see as much of the country as possible. Imitating his hero Natty Bumppo, Abbey traveled throughout much of the American West, and he fell in love with its landscapes because he believed that parts of the natural world in the Southwest, unlike his home in Pennsylvania, remained unaltered by human interference. After he served in the Army during the last year of World War II, Abbey returned to the western landscapes that had so transfixed him in his earlier travels, and he vowed to halt, by means both legal and illegal, any and all who threatened to destroy them in the name of so-called progress. Although he admitted on multiple occasions to engaging in acts of

ecosabotage,⁸⁷ Abbey's most influential protest came in the form of his writing, which has inspired thousands of other environmentalists and ecosaboteurs (Philippon, *Conserving* 240).

In his essay "A Writer's Credo," Abbey clearly expresses the political imperative that pervades his work: "I write to record the truth of our time as best as I can see it. To investigate the comedy and tragedy of human relationships. To oppose, resist, and sabotage the contemporary drift toward a global technocratic police state, whatever its ideological coloration. I write to oppose injustice, to defy power, and to speak for the voiceless" (*One Life* 177-78). Abbey's desire to defend the environment is apparent in almost all of his works, and he often features himself in his nonfiction and the characters in his fiction as ecosaboteurs who employ illegal and even violent protest tactics to defend vulnerable landscapes. For example, in his best-known novel *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975), his four protagonists, whom he describes as "eco-raiders" (45), travel throughout the Southwest burning down road-side signs, pulling up land developers' survey stakes, knocking down power lines, cutting livestock fences, dismantling bulldozers, and blowing up the bridges, railroad tracks, and pipelines that facilitate the coal, oil, copper, uranium, and nuclear facilities in the region. The characters are fond of these "beautification projects" (9), and while some critics may deem them acts of vandalism, Bill McKibben argues that "Abbey would probably call [them acts of] counter-vandalism" (18). In all of their endeavors, the eco-raiders labor under "the conservative instinct to keep things not as they are but as they should be ... to keep it like it was" (20). Additionally, their acts of ecosabotage, be they vandalism or counter-vandalism, are motivated by the belief that the psychological and spiritual health of the nation depends upon the preservation of "wild" spaces.

⁸⁷ I use the word "ecosabotage" to refer to the sabotage of inanimate private property owned by those complicit in environmental destruction. The difference between "ecosabotage" and "ecoterrorism" will be discussed later in this chapter.

Much of Abbey's work demonstrates the indelible connections between human and nonhuman networks, and he consistently articulates an acute fear of the negative psychological consequences of the looming ecological crisis. To prevent this potential crisis, Abbey advocates some of the most radical forms of environmental philosophy and activism yet seen in America. As a result, Abbey's environmentalism is conflicted; he and his characters campaign for the democratization of human and ecological communities, while simultaneously bypassing actual democratic political processes as they mete out vigilante justice whenever and wherever they see fit. Many scholars, for example Daniel J. Philippon, have argued that ultimately Abbey "will be remembered most for his identification and popularization of ecosabotage, a legacy that took concrete form with the appearance of Earth First! in 1980" (249). While Abbey will likely be remembered for his promotion of ecosabotage and environmental anarchism, I contend that these are not the most significant facets of his work. Abbey earnestly desired an extreme restructuring of America based on the tenets of anarchism, and he believed that ecosabotage was a viable protest tactic. However, both his anarchism and his ecosabotage ultimately proved ideologically untenable and impractical to implement. Rather the strength of much of Abbey's work lies elsewhere—in its ability to inspire readers to experience and respond to the natural world in new ways. Throughout this chapter, I seek to demonstrate that Abbey's evocation of anarchism and ecosabotage is problematic, resulting in a position that was largely ineffective and even counterproductive for the environmental movement. In contrast, I argue that Abbey disseminated his life-affirming environmental philosophy to wide and varied audiences. Moreover, his complex, poststructuralist interpretation of linguistics enabled him to become one of the first postmodern environmental writers.

In addition to examining Abbey's fiction in this chapter, I also analyze Abbey's nonfiction and several key events in his own life. Studying these biographical elements provides important insights into his work and the environmental uses and limits of his oeuvre. I follow Lawrence Buell's analysis of Thoreau in *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (1995): "Yet clearly some authors are as likely to be remembered, and more likely to exert widespread influence, in the form of gestalts based not only on their writings but also on actual or supposed events of their lives, the totality of which converges to yield myths of authorial stance and voice that are shaped by the cultural climates of succeeding generations" (312). Like Thoreau, Abbey generated a cultural mythology of his own life, through his self-promoting documentation of it, making a "*sola scriptura*" approach to his work nearly impossible (Buell 371). Moreover, blurring the line between the author and the text, in the case of Abbey at least, can lead to a robust understanding of his work as well as the culture out of which this work emerged. Abbey's texts, then, can be considered works of authorial will but they also result from a vast matrix of socio-cultural and environmental forces.

Abbey's lifelong advocacy of anarchism and ecosabotage was inspired by the man-made environmental changes he witnessed in the West, particularly the "Four Corners" region, where Utah, Arizona, Colorado, and New Mexico converge. While in some cases these changes constituted the nearly wholesale destruction of particular ecosystems, Abbey was often preoccupied with the "domestication," rather than destruction, of "wild" spaces: "If industrial man continues to multiply his numbers and expand his operations he will succeed in his apparent intention, to seal himself off from the natural and isolate himself within a synthetic prison of his

own making” (*Desert Solitaire* 169). In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the cancerous growth of the capitalist, industrial machine triggers the novel’s acts of ecosabotage. In particular, the eco-raiders fear that the ultimate goal of this machine is the complete domestication of the natural world, and they blame this ideology on both private land developers and governmental agencies. Believing that these groups engage in destructive and immoral forms of environmental colonialism, Abbey and his characters call for them to be overthrown. In his essay “Eco-Defense,” Abbey asserts, “Representative government in the USA represents money, not people, and therefore has forfeited our allegiance and moral support. We owe it nothing but the taxation it extorts from us under threats of seizure of property, imprisonment, or in some cases already, when resisted, a violent death by gunfire” (30). He also explains that “Eco-defense means fighting back. Eco-defense means sabotage. Eco-defense is risky but sporting; unauthorized but fun; illegal but ethically imperative” (31).⁸⁸

For Abbey and the characters who populate his fictional landscapes, the most significant example of the government’s desire to domesticate the natural world involves its manipulation of the rivers and watersheds of the American West. In his essay “The Damnation of a Canyon,” Abbey describes his particular aversion to dams:

I take a dim view of dams; I find it hard to learn to love cement; I am poorly impressed by concrete aggregates and statistics in the cubic tons. But in this weakness I am not alone, for I belong to that ever-growing number of Americans, probably a good majority now, who have become aware that a fully industrialized, thoroughly urbanized, elegantly computerized social system is not suitable for

⁸⁸ “Eco-Defense” was published as the Foreword to Dave Foreman’s *Eco-Defense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching* and later was reprinted in Abbey’s collection *One Life at a Time, Please* (1988).

human habitation. Great for machines, yes. But unfit for people. (*Beyond the Wall* 96)

More than any other dam project in the region, Abbey abhorred the construction of the Glen Canyon Dam, which altered the flow of the Colorado River by creating a hydroelectric reservoir called Lake Powell that straddles the border between Utah and Arizona. According to historian Douglas Brinkley, “Glen Canyon Dam was a pork-barrel project ostensibly built to provide Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Phoenix with electric power at low cost; in fact, it was an engineering abomination that destroyed an entire ecosystem” (xix). Lake Powell not only destroyed the natural hydrology of the Colorado River but also buried much of Glen Canyon, the beauty of which, Abbey claims, surpassed Europe’s grandest cathedrals. In a *New York Times* review of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Jim Harrison echoes this point, saying that the Glen Canyon Dam was “an ecological disaster equal to a firebombing of the Louvre” (11). Daniel G. Payne contends that witnessing the creation of the Glen Canyon Dam was “a radicalizing experience for [Abbey], analogous in many ways to Muir’s response to the destruction of the Hetch-Hetchy Valley” (202).⁸⁹ Abbey’s fury over the dam inspired much of his writing, including his memoir, *Desert Solitaire* (1968), and two of his novels, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* (1975) and *Hayduke Lives!* (1990). In all three of these texts, Abbey and his characters plot incessantly to blow up the dam and restore the river and its canyon.

⁸⁹ According to Trevor Turpin, John Muir is perhaps the “first conservationist to take a pen against dams” (172). Muir was particularly concerned about the Yosemite area of California, which was made into a national park in 1890. Muir co-founded the Sierra Club, which was instrumental in fighting the damming of the Hetch Hetchy, located in the Yosemite National Park. Muir writes in *The Yosemite* (1912), “Landscape gardens, places of recreation and worship, are never made beautiful by destroying and burying them . . . these temple destroyers seem to have a perfect contempt for Nature and instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the Mountains, lift them to the Almighty Dollar . . . Dam Hetch Hetchy! As well dam for water-tanks the people’s cathedrals and churches, for no holier temple has ever been consecrated by the heart of man” (qtd. in Turpin 174; *Yosemite* 260). After fighting the dam for a decade, Muir’s crusade ultimately failed. Congress ultimately passed the Raker Bill, and Woodrow Wilson signed it in 1913, authorizing the O’Shaughnessy Dam. The dam was started in 1915 and completed in 1922 (175).

Abbey's obsession with this particular ecological disaster is by no means arbitrary. During and after the Roosevelt era, the proliferation of dams in the American South, particularly in the Tennessee Valley and the Atchafalaya Basin in Louisiana, inspired much of the support for federally funded dam building in the Southwest (Killingsworth 19). Marc Reisner argues that the Hoover Dam ushered in the "age of dams," which reached its "apogee in the 1950s and 1960s, when hundreds upon hundreds of them were thrown up [in the West], forever altering the face of the continent" (158-59). For Abbey and his fictional characters, undoing mid-century environmental containment culture and halting the construction of new dams are top priorities, because they link American identity to the existence of wild nature: "His opposition to the construction of Glen Canyon Dam and the formation of Lake Powell is primarily based on the fact that the free-flowing canyon river represents liberation, whereas the placid, impounded lake constitutes an environment under social control" (Lynch 98-99).

Abbey's 1968 memoir *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* is his first text that devotes substantial attention to the Glen Canyon Dam. *Desert Solitaire* principally depicts Abbey's experience as a seasonal park ranger at the Arches National Monument, located outside of Moab in southeastern Utah. During the period featured in the memoir, Abbey worked by himself in the park and lived alone twenty miles into the interior of the canyonlands. Descriptions of his duties are often punctuated with evocative descriptions of the ecosystems of the Southwest, and the watersheds of this region are a recurring target of both fascination and concern for Abbey. In a chapter simply entitled "Water," he contends that until recently the lack of water has determined humans' presence in western landscapes: "If we had water here ... this country would not be what it is. It would be like Ohio, wet and humid and hydrological, all covered with cabbage farms and golf courses. Instead of this lovely barren desert we would have

another blooming garden state, like New Jersey” (113). Abbey refutes the notion that there is not enough water in the desert: “There is no shortage of water in the desert but exactly the right amount, a perfect ratio ... which makes the arid West so different from any other part of the nation. There is no lack of water here, unless you try to establish a city where no city should be” (126). Abbey then turns his attention to the politicians and businessmen who he says are attempting to build dams and divert water all over the West in order to facilitate the future industrial growth of the region. This insistence on a model of infinite growth is precisely what incenses Abbey: “They cannot see that growth for the sake of growth is a cancerous madness... They would never understand that an economic system which can only expand or expire must be false to all that is human” (126). The identification of capitalism’s model of infinite growth as cancerous becomes a pervasive trope in Abbey’s work, and he uses it repeatedly to rally support for his platforms of anarchism and ecosabotage.

In the chapter of *Desert Solitaire* entitled “Down the River,” Abbey recalls a trip that he and his friend Ralph Newcomb took down a portion of the Colorado River before it was dammed to create Lake Powell. As in James Dickey’s *Deliverance*, construction of the dam has already begun, and Abbey and Newcomb hastily plan the trip before the river is submerged under a lake. In this chapter, Abbey simultaneously chronicles his ecstatic and, at times, nearly erotic enjoyment of the river (154), while also lamenting its imminent loss. His intense love of the Colorado River explains his anger over the contamination caused by its damming, and he utilizes this contamination to support the need for its protection: “In any case, when a man must be afraid to drink freely from his country’s rivers and streams that country is no longer fit to live in. Time then to move on, to find another country or—in the name of Jefferson—to make another country. ‘The tree of liberty is nourished by the blood of tyrants’” (162). Abbey then moves from

Jefferson to the Russian anarchist Mikhail Bakunin, asserting, “There are times when creation can be achieved only through destruction. The urge to destroy is then a creative urge” (162). Abbey even fantasizes in this chapter about an “unknown hero” dynamiting the Glen Canyon Dam at its grand opening ceremony (165). Although his argument for ecosabotage is much less overt here than it will become in his later work, *Desert Solitaire* represents Abbey’s earliest articulation of his radical platform. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Hayduke Lives!*, Abbey’s further indulges his fantasy of destroying the Glen Canyon Dam and restoring the wildness of the Colorado River.

The Monkey Wrench Gang brings together four characters who share little in common except for a love for the landscapes and waterscapes of the West. The group includes a prominent surgeon Doc Sarvis, a feminist and French literature expert Bonnie Abzug, a Mormon river guide Seldom Seen Smith, and a former Green Beret George Washington Hayduke.⁹⁰ The gang meets while on a river rafting trip, and they almost immediately begin to conspire against all forms of environmental colonialism in “their projected field of operations: the canyon country, southeast Utah and northern Arizona” (71). Like Abbey himself, each member of the gang is obsessed with the destruction of the Glen Canyon Dam, and although they plan and complete many other acts of ecosabotage, the Glen Canyon Dam is their ultimate target. They apply their motto “to keep it like it was” (20) to the dam with particular assiduousness, because they consider the Colorado River the “heart of the heart of the American West” (119). Thus, they despise the fact that it has become “tame and domesticated” (2): “What was once a mighty river. Now a ghost” (2). In a Prologue to *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, which takes place after the events captured in the novel’s main narrative, the eco-raiders first blow up the Glen

⁹⁰ Scott Slovic argues that “while the characterizations are lively and, as Jim Harrison said, ‘convincing,’ they are nonetheless caricatures, exaggerated character types” (108).

Canyon Bridge, which connects Utah and Arizona, and then at the end of the Prologue, they are on their way to blow up the dam. In the last pages of the novel, Smith is “Still working on the dam plan” (419), and Hayduke has taken a job as a night watchman at the dam to gain better access to its interior so that he can plant explosives there (421).

Abbey’s preoccupation with the Glen Canyon Dam extends to his final novel, *Hayduke Lives!*, in which he reunites his eco-raiders again in order to commit further acts of ecosabotage in their native West. While Doc, Bonnie, and Smith are initially reluctant to re-engage in ecosabotage, Hayduke has remained committed, and throughout the novel, he continually seeks to destroy the “monstrous megamachine” of techno-industrial society (114). Although Hayduke does not destroy the dam in *Hayduke Lives!*, the dam does come up several times throughout the novel. Most notably, in one chapter, Hayduke, disguised as “The Baron,” dumps paint on the dam from a plane in order to form a giant X on its surface. This chapter entails the most sustained attention that the dam receives in the novel, despite the fact that destroying it remains a key goal for the characters: “The dam. *That dam*. Glen Canyon Dam. That goddamned unforgiveable dam ... the world’s most despised and hated dam” (184). The X Hayduke leaves on the face of the dam is “the ‘X’ of condemnation, of doom implacable, inescapable, complete and certain” (184). This mark conveys the gang’s intention to destroy the dam. However, the fact that the dam is still in place at the end of the novel is, within the fictional world of the eco-raiders, strangely incongruous, since in the concluding scene of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Hayduke seems to have concrete plans in place to blow it up. In *Hayduke Lives!*, Hayduke pulls the same stunt repeatedly: he takes a job at a company that he believes is harming the natural world; he gains access to both the company’s location and its employees; and finally he exacts revenge, often by annihilating the business’s headquarters. What are we then to make of the fact

that Hayduke initiated this plan in the conclusion of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and yet the dam still exists in the Glen Canyon in the novel's sequel, *Hayduke Lives!*? Did Hayduke fail in the mission he started in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*? Also, why does he merely mark the dam as a target in *Hayduke Lives!* rather than destroying it?

The most likely reason for this gap in the narrative is that Abbey could not destroy the dam in his fiction because his readers, of course, would know that it still exists in reality. Without the sequel, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* ends with the hope that the dam will be destroyed in the future, but the reader does not actually see it destroyed in the novel. Abbey may have hoped that his readers would not remember that both the Prologue and the conclusion of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* strongly suggest that the dam would soon be destroyed. In *Hayduke Lives!*, Hayduke's role functions similarly to his role in *The Monkey Wrench Gang* in that he vows to destroy the dam at some unspecified moment in the future, rather than destroying it in the novel. Therefore, the X that Hayduke paints on the surface of the dam may mark a symbolic target for Abbey's readers. Abbey refuses to provide a satisfying conclusion to the two-novel narrative of his eco-raiders, because he does not want to create complacency in his readers. In short, Abbey incites direct action.

Such a radical polemic advocating illegal means of returning the Colorado River to its "wild" and "natural" state can best be understood in relation to the fact that Abbey's characters tend to pledge allegiance to particular places rather than to the country in which those places exist. In his essay, "Freedom and Wilderness, Wilderness and Freedom," Abbey explains why he believes that protecting wilderness areas is so important for the U.S.:

We can have wilderness without freedom; we can have wilderness without human life at all; but we cannot have freedom without wilderness, we cannot have

freedom without leagues of open space beyond the cities, where boys and girls, men and women, can live at least part of their lives under no control but their own desires and abilities, free from any and all direct administration by their fellow men. (235)

Likewise, in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Doc states, “To the question: Wilderness, who needs it? [I] would say: Because we like the taste of freedom, comrades” (261). Given the potential significance of the natural world to both individual and national identity formation, the eco-raiders in the novel believe that they are justified in halting the destruction of the wilderness using whatever means are available. Moreover, they contend that the West is a “holy land” that is governed by a “higher law” (27). Therefore, throughout the narrative, the characters promote the notion that their behavior is in no way determined by U.S. laws, especially since they consider those laws to be made by corrupt governing bodies. Moreover, they often suggest a sense of identity determined by specific bioregions rather than by state or national boundaries. For instance, the narrator describes Smith as “A true autochthonic patriot, [who] swears allegiance only to the land he knows, not to that swollen bulge of real estate, industry and swarming populations of displaced British Islanders and Europeans and misplaced Africans known collectively as the United States; his loyalties phase out toward the borders of the Colorado Plateau” (391). Loyal to the land rather than to governments and corporations, the eco-raiders have no ethical qualms about defending, often with violent military tactics, a landscape they self-consciously identify as their “country.”

Abbey’s disavowal of the U.S. as “country” and the wholesale disregard of the U.S. legal system reflect his lifelong preoccupation with anarchist theory. Despite his frequent posturing as a provincial, flute-playing desert marauder, Abbey was acutely aware of the social and political

ramifications of his advocacy of environmental anarchism. Before turning his hand to fiction, Abbey received bachelor's and master's degrees in philosophy from the University of New Mexico, and he studied anarchist theory while on a Fulbright Scholarship at the University of Edinburgh in Scotland. In his thesis "Anarchy and the Morality of Violence," he asserts that anarchism offers principled opposition to "the organized violence of the state" (qtd. in Brinkley xviii). In an interview in 1981, Abbey further explains his commitment to anarchism:

I'm...something of an anarchist, because I learned long ago to distrust the government, and not only the government but all big institutions: big business, big military, big cities, big churches, big labor unions...any institution that grows so large that it's no longer under the control of its membership. My kind of anarchism is no more than democracy pushed as far as it can be pushed, government by the people, decentralized power in all its forms. (8)

Abbey's clearest and most concise articulation of anarchism appears in the essay "A Theory of Anarchy," which he originally published in *Earth First!: The Radical Environmental Journal* and later reprinted in *One Life at a Time, Please* (1988). In this brief essay, Abbey contends that power is the root of all contemporary political issues: "The problem of democracy is the problem of power—how to keep power decentralized, equally distributed, fairly shared. Anarchism means maximum democracy: the maximum possible dispersal of political power, economic power, and force—military power" (25-26). Abbey also claims that "We are a nation of helots ruled by an oligarchy of techno-military-industrial administrators" (28), and he even asserts that the whole "American experiment" has been a "failure" because "We have not become the society of independent freeholders that Jefferson envisioned; nor have we evolved into a true democracy—government *by* the people—as Lincoln imagined" (27). Abbey carefully points out that he does

not advocate for a truly lawless society; rather he desires a “truer” form of democracy in which there are no rulers. Similar to Lewis’s worldview in Dickey’s *Deliverance*, Abbey’s vision of a ruler-less community seems utopian and borders on the primitivistic: “An anarchist community would consist (as it did in preagricultural and preindustrial times) of a voluntary association of free and independent families, self-reliant and self-supporting but bound by kinship ties and a tradition of mutual aid” (26). Abbey’s close friend and fellow ecosaboteur Jack Loeffler states that Abbey’s anarchist vision was not merely theoretical; rather it was something that he actually planned for his own life: “For years, it was Abbey’s great fantasy that a small group of families comprised of trusted friends who were creative and committed to wilderness preservation should buy land together and thus found an anarchist commune which would be governed by consensus and NOT laws” (47).⁹¹

Various expressions of Abbey’s anarchism emerge in his memoirs and novels. Although *Desert Solitaire* does not contain any ruminations specifically about anarchism, the book is full of tirades against the government and western culture, and “Abbey undoubtedly enjoyed the irony of being a government employee arguing for the overthrow of all governments” (Alderman 141). In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey pits “civilization,” which he seems to equate with vibrant democracy, against “culture,” which he equates with institutionalized hegemony rather broadly: “Civilization is the vital force in human history; culture is that inert mass of institutions and organizations which accumulate around and tend to drag down the advance of life” (246).

⁹¹ Abbey articulates a similar fantasy in “A Theory of Anarchy”: “Even without the accident of a nuclear war, I predict that the military-industrial state will disappear from the surface of the earth within a century. That belief is the basis of my inherent optimism, the source of my hope for the coming restoration of a higher civilization: scattered human populations modest in number that live by fishing, hunting, food gathering, small-scale farming and ranching, that gather once a year in the ruins of abandoned cities for great festivals of moral, spiritual, artistic, and intellectual renewal, a people for whom the wilderness is not a playground but their natural native home” (28).

Perhaps not surprisingly, Abbey uses environmental imagery generally and hydrological metaphors specifically to describe his position: “Civilization is the wild river; culture, 592,000 tons of cement... Civilization flows; culture thickens and coagulates, like tired sick, stifled blood” (246). Thus, according to this logic, governments halt the progress of individual liberty in the way that dams block the flow of wild rivers.

Anarchism is much more explicit in Abbey’s fiction. In particular, *The Monkey Wrench Gang* presents anarchist theories and links those theories to environmental philosophy and activism. Unlike his nonfiction, though, the novel does not examine anarchism as a carefully considered political platform based on extreme democratization. Instead, when the characters and the narrator discuss anarchism, they use the term loosely, often suggesting erratic, irresponsible, and even violent actions. This reductive conception of anarchism is generally identified with Hayduke, a former Green Beret and Vietnam veteran, who is comfortable with the unfettered use of violence and sabotage when protecting the landscapes of the West. For example, he asserts, “Who needs their bloody stinking law? ... This is my country. Mine and Seldom’s and Doc’s ... and just let them try and fuck up any of this and they’re in real trouble. Real deep trouble, the fuckers. Got to draw that line somewhere and we might as well draw it right along Comb Ridge, the Monument Upward and the Book Cliffs” (366-67). Doc Sarvis, the eco-raiders’ eldest member and spokesman, opposes Hayduke’s tactics, especially the use of violence, claiming that “it suggested anarchy, and anarchy is not the answer” (74). However, despite the fact that Doc is the most learned and articulate member of the group, his message of anti-anarchic civil disobedience is undermined throughout the novel, simply by virtue of the fact that Hayduke is constantly valorized and glamorized. Thus, the narrative’s overarching argument tends to support anarchism, and not Abbey’s understanding of the theory, but rather Hayduke’s,

which is essentially synonymous with lawlessness, destruction, and violence. Ironically, Doc opposes simplistic evocations of anarchy; however, the worldview that he espouses often sounds precisely like a politically and theoretically complex theory of anarchy. Doc imagines all “the oligarchs and oligopoly” of the US, including governmental agencies such as the TVA, to be a “conglomerated cartel spread out upon half the planet Earth like a global kraken, pantentacled, wall-eyed and parrot-beaked, its brain a bank of computer data centers, its blood the flow of money, its heart a radioactive dynamo, its language the technetronic monologue of number imprinted on magnetic tape” (172). This dialogue between Doc and Hayduke continues to unfold in *Hayduke Lives!* For example, Doc says that he does not believe in guns and he associates the use of guns with anarchy (274). Hayduke, on the other hand, constantly makes anarchist assertions, such as “Forward to anarchy” (274), and the narrator continually glorifies anarchism, particularly Hayduke’s conception of anarchism: “The urge to destroy that which is evil, said the anarchist Prince Bakunin, is a creative urge” (278).

Since the mid-twentieth century, admirers of Abbey have tended to support his use of anarchism in his environmental crusades. Jack Loeffler even argues that “Edward Abbey’s greatest single contribution to western culture has been to meld environmentalism with anarchism” (49). Some scholars have also supported, at least tentatively, Abbey’s use of anarchism. Peter Quigley, the editor of the only collected volume of critical scholarship on Abbey, takes a rather generous view when considering Abbey’s anarchism: “Abbey refuses definition because, as an anarchist, it is not this or that position that he is aiming for but the abandonment of static positions that disallow democratic multiplicity. It is crucial to recall that it is not freedom from any responsibility that is the goal. As Abbey states, ‘*Anarchy is democracy*

taken seriously” (307). However, in recent years, some scholars have begun to call into question both the theorization and the usefulness of Abbey’s anarchism.

One particularly problematic facet of Abbey’s anarchism is its incompatibility with either of the categorizations, social or political, into which scholars tend to place anarchists. According to Harold Alderman, both social and political anarchists accept the premise that it is not “natural” for humans to live under a government and that life is generally better without the oversight of governments (138). In the struggle between governments and individuals, social anarchists tend to withdraw from politics in order to attain a state of living that they consider both freer and more natural: “This version of anarchism generally holds that the only thing that matters in human life is freedom. The inevitable enemy of freedom is government. Therefore, like Nietzsche, social anarchists believe that the genuine human being begins ‘only where the state ends’” (Alderman 139). In contrast, Alderman explains that political anarchism is closely related to communism in that it seeks to lessen governmental oppression by doing away with all forms of private property: “What was needed, then to make this historic reversal of state oppression? Most generally, the answer was: eliminate private property, Locke’s most fundamental natural right” (139).

Both Alderman and Steve Norwick suggest that while Abbey was certainly not a political anarchist, he could be considered a social anarchist. For example, Norwick states, “Like Nietzsche, Abbey was not an advocate of any of the political forms of anarchism, even environmental anarchism such as Murray Bookchin’s. Abbey did not have any specific plan to reach anarchy and did not design or advocate any particular utopian scheme” (196). Similarly, Alderson says, “From neither John W. Burns⁹² nor George W. Hayduke can one derive a

⁹² Burns is another character who has been engaging in ecosabotage alongside Hayduke throughout *Hayduke Lives!* I discuss Burns in more detail later in this chapter.

political theory of anarchism” (143). In support of Abbey’s social anarchism, Norwick writes, “Abbey’s and Nietzsche’s anarchism is instead characterized by advocating extreme individualism. And for both writers, social anarchism was perhaps their most important issue” (Norwick 196). Again, Alderman’s view is similar to Norwick’s: “He is anarchistic in the original Greek sense of ‘refusing to be ruled by another.’ Anarchistic also in the Nietzschean social sense that ‘the genuine individual begins only where the state ends.’ In both of these senses, Burns and Hayduke reflect Abbey’s anarchism” (146). However, I contend that neither of these positions is completely accurate. Regarding political anarchism, Abbey could be said to have a particular plan, which included creating a commune with like-minded environmentalists. Moreover, he engaged in far too many acts of protest, both through his writing and through his own ecosabotage, to be considered a social anarchist who is intent on merely escaping rather than combating the U.S. government. Overall, Abbey’s platform was inconsistent, and he was all too often caught somewhere between social and political anarchism, a position that was ultimately untenable.

In addition, I contend that many scholars, including Norwick and Alderman, are often overly accommodating of Abbey’s haphazard evocation of anarchism. For instance, Alderman concludes his argument by claiming that we might label Abbey anarchistic, despite his failing to cultivate a discernible political theory of anarchism: “And here, I think, we are as close to understanding Abbey as we can get. He was a man in perpetual rebellion—against himself, against the status quo, and against the mediocrity of the past that crushed the human spirit. The great rebels, like Edward Paul Abbey, are not contained by the names of ideology” (148-49). In this passage, Alderman is guilty of glamorizing Abbey’s anarchism in the same way that Abbey was often guilty of glamorizing Hayduke’s. In all his discussions of anarchism, Abbey fails to

consider the possibility that state deregulation would likely increase, not decrease, the power of capitalist corporations and technocracy more broadly.⁹³ Abbey's anarchism is, at times, reminiscent of a particular brand of neoliberalism—for example, extreme libertarianism—which has come under attack in recent years by many social scientists. For example, in “The Trigger of History: Capitalism, Modernity, and the Politics of Place,” historian T.J. Jackson Lears states,

By now it should be clear that the neoliberal project has failed to pay up on its promissory notes. The vision of global prosperity fed by free-flowing capital has turned out to be a mirage. The transatlantic effort to recreate the reign of laissez-faire capitalism has had catastrophic global consequences. Four decades of deregulation and free-market policies have produced widening class inequalities and accelerating ecological devastation worldwide. (82)

Thus, anarchism, like extreme libertarianism, may prove powerless to halt the unfettered growth model of capitalism, and the alternative that Abbey proposes, the subsistence hunter-gatherer model, seems almost comically naïve.

In addition to “anarchism,” some critics label radical protest tactics like Abbey's “ecosabotage,” while others label them acts of “ecoterrorism.” The distinction between these two terms is particularly important both for Abbey and for contemporary environmental justice more broadly. I use the term “ecosabotage” to mean the targeted destruction of inanimate objects, such as bulldozers, chain saws, or strip mining excavators, that are used to alter or destroy various facets of the natural world. In the context of the U.S., this term has been associated with groups

⁹³ Abbey often uses the term “technocracy” and he typically does so without fully explaining what he means by it. However, as I mentioned previously, I think that his definition would likely be similar to what T.J. Jackson Lears calls “techno-determinism”: “Whatever its variation in detail, the central story [of modernity] is always the same: technology churns out transformative and ultimately beneficent change; some will suffer in the transition to the New Era, but in the end all will be well. In any case there isn't a damned thing we can do about it. Technology is in charge” (83).

like Earth First! and Earth Liberation Front, both of which were inspired—the former directly and the latter indirectly—by Abbey’s writing. Since the 1980s, a vast cultural shift has altering the perception of these radical environmentalists as activists to thinking of them as terrorists. This cultural shift was accompanied by a linguistic shift, and thus terms like “monkey wrencher,” “saboteur,” and “environmental warrior” have been eclipsed by the term “ecoterrorist.” Differentiating these terms and the ideas undergirding them was a major concern for Abbey and continues to preoccupy many environmental activists.

In his recent book *Green Is the New Red: An Insider’s Account of a Social Movement Under Siege* (2011), Will Potter argues that the current “green scare” is similar to the “red scare” of the McCarthy era in that contemporary environmental activists have been vilified in the same way that supposed midcentury Communists were, not because they pose an actual threat to American civil liberties but rather because they pose a threat to capitalism. Potter even argues that the cultural shift to vilify radical environmentalists is the result of corporations that have purposely applied language that evokes fear of domestic terrorism in order to make the public scared of environmentalist tactics. According to Potter, in the present political climate, both the government and global corporations are persecuting radical activists, precisely because they have been effective in changing public perceptions and in cutting into corporate profits.

Perhaps due to pressure from large corporations, the U.S. Congress has expanded terrorism laws in order to include the destruction of property or the loss of profits; this expansion has subsequently increased paranoia about ecoterrorism: “Of particular note in this calculus is the inclusion of acts solely against ‘property’ for political, social, or environmental purposes—removing the notion that an act should harm ‘persons’ in order to be considered terrorism” (Amster 289; see also Sumner and Weidman 858-59). This definition contradicts the definition

of terrorism maintained by the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism, according to which terrorism is generally targeted at civilians. Under the 2001 USA PATRIOT Act, the definition of terrorism has expanded to include violence against inanimate objects (Vanderheiden 429), and since 9/11 the FBI has labeled ecoterrorists the leading U.S. domestic terrorist group. However, some critics, including Will Potter, contend that this expansion was not the result of post-9/11 increases in national defense; rather they argue that corporations used the political climate of fear and paranoia in post-9/11 America to bolster new legislation—including the PATRIOT Act—that would in turn increase corporations’ ability to protect themselves from radical activists.

Additionally, political theorists argue that to lump together actual terrorists with ecoterrorists may be counterproductive for the war on terror in that it focuses undue attention on groups whose tactics, do not threaten the physical safety of Americans (Sumner and Weidman 856). For example, political scientist Steve Vanderheiden states, “Once harm to property interests is allowed to count as the equivalent to harm to persons in the moral assessment of terrorism, one begins on a perilous slope down which this initial expansion leads inevitably to a trivialization of what ought to be among the most serious moral transgressions by association with far less serious offenses” (430). Thus, according to Vanderheiden, we must relegate “attacks (or threatened attacks) against inanimate objects to a distinct and less objectionable (though not necessarily benign) category of offense” (430).⁹⁴ Furthermore, Randall Amster argues that using the label “ecoterrorist” has diminished the efficacy of dialogue about cultural practices that are causing disastrous environmental effects. Amster notes that the term “ecoterrorism” “has

⁹⁴ Steve Vanderheiden does allow, though, that some attacks against inanimate objects could constitute acts of terrorism if they indirectly resulted in “deleterious effects upon the health and welfare of that population”—for instance, through the destruction of shelter or water supplies (431). He also notes that attacks on “infrastructure or objects of extraordinary cultural importance” may constitute terrorism, if such attacks would have disastrous future effects on a society (432).

increasingly been invoked as a method of discrediting and investigating mainstream environmental groups that employ strategies of longstanding, acceptable, democratic behavior” (287). The trivialization of terrorism to include, for example, protesters chaining themselves to trees slated for harvesting has resulted in a sort of catch-all definition of terrorism that seems to encompass any action that threatens the hegemony of either the U.S. government or U.S. corporations.

Vanderheiden usefully locates ecosabotage within “a continuum of political tactics” that ranges from terrorism to ecosabotage to civil disobedience:

Less serious acts of resistance (and so situated between civil disobedience and ecotage) include illegal but largely symbolic acts of vandalism (e.g., billboard modification through ‘subvertising’) or trespass (e.g., squatting in trees slated for extraction), as these primarily aim for social change through the mobilization of public support, while ecotage instead aims primarily at the profitability of acts taken to be ecologically destructive. (432-33)

Vanderheiden ultimately concludes that individuals have a moral obligation to attempt to attain social justice first through “mainstream politics and good faith negotiation, and then through civil disobedience” (446). However, he refuses to disregard ecosabotage altogether, claiming that it could be deployed defensibly if all other tactics had been attempted without results. Lawrence Buell shifts the focus away from purported “ecoterrorism” to the destructive behaviors that so often inspire such acts of radical activism, and he argues that we need to concentrate “first and foremost on making the case for paradigms of environmental value that would dramatize how systemic human abuse of the nonhuman world is ultimately far more threatening both to it and to human survival than what is called ecoterrorism” (“What Is” 165).

Peter Quigley argues that “Abbey labored over the distinction between saboteur and terrorist” (“Introduction” 8), and it is clear that Abbey’s advocacy of environmental sabotage extends beyond his fiction. Jack Loeffler notes, “Now that Ed lies far beyond the reach of the statute of limitations, it can be revealed that he did not limit his attacks against wilderness rapists to his writings. He was an activist, a warrior armed with the tools of a warrior” (48; see also Philippon 246). In his master’s thesis, Abbey asserts that “violence and rebellion, when exercised in the name of a cause which we hold to be morally just, and after peaceful means have been attempted and failed, can be justified as being—under the pressure of extreme circumstances—both a true and necessary expression of the human aspiration toward the good” (qtd. in Philippon 226). Thus, Abbey suggests that violence can be a necessary evil when a “critical situation” develops “in which all moral alternatives have been eliminated...but two: passive submission to unquestioned wrong, or the exercise of violence” (qtd. in Philippon 226).⁹⁵ However, some scholars, such as Ann Ronald and Scott Slovic, have argued that Abbey was not actually promoting illegal action (Lindholdt 107). For example, Slovic asserts, “*The Monkey Wrench Gang* is less a clear-cut call to action than a call to feeling” (104). This warning is important to take into account, particularly regarding *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Hayduke Lives!* Daniel G. Payne reminds us that these “are, after all, works of fiction, and to identify the sentiments of a character such as Hayduke with those of Abbey himself is a risky business to say the least” (204). Nevertheless, considering Abbey’s nonfiction in relation to his fiction illustrates that Abbey not only condoned but also encouraged acts of ecosabotage.

Both Abbey’s fiction and his nonfiction describe examples of the “critical situation” that he claims in his master’s thesis would justify the careful employment of ecosabotage (Philippon 226). Perhaps Abbey never staged the destruction of the Glen Canyon Dam in his fiction because

⁹⁵ Abbey applies this argument specifically to environmental justice in his essay “Eco-Defense.”

his vision for an environmental utopia, or ecotopia, is literal as well as literary. The work of dismantling the dam is left to future ecosaboteurs or to deep ecological time.⁹⁶ Paul Lindholdt states, “Abbey lived in the tension between capitulation to technocracy on the one hand, and anarchy on the other. If as a citizen he was helpless before the technological juggernaut, at least as an artist he could proffer some vicarious satisfaction” (110). However, this interpretation does not hold true for the Glen Canyon Dam. Abbey refuses to settle for “vicarious satisfaction” concerning the one environmental disaster he considered the “symbol of absolute evil” (Loeffler 47). According to Loeffler, Abbey actually had fairly elaborate plans in place to blow up the dam, a claim that is also supported by Abbey’s journal: “Abbey fantasizes about destroying the dam and letting the canyon gradually revert to its natural state a number of times; first in a June 1959 entry in his journal” (Payne 202).

While Abbey’s revolutionary subversion is relatively understated in *Desert Solitaire*, it becomes much more obvious in his fiction. In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, the eco-raiders’ “beautification projects,” which include the destruction of roadside signs, bulldozers, and even a train, are portrayed as both necessary and justifiable because all other tactics had previously been attempted. Thus, Hayduke, in particular, advocates for violence, because “They tried everything else... they tried lawsuits, big fucking propaganda campaigns, politics” (169). Moreover, the acts of ecosabotage are described in such lengthy detail that reading the novel is often tedious. Philippon suggests that although the technical passages of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* are literary weaknesses, they could be considered strengths if they are meant to provide specific blueprints

⁹⁶ For an example of deep ecological time, see Abbey’s “Lake Powell by Houseboat” in which he describes the haunting experience of traveling on Lake Powell after the Colorado River was dammed. In this essay, Abbey rejoices in the knowledge that the dam will be destroyed naturally within three hundred years: “I was even more pleased to learn that sedimentation is proceeding rapidly and that the useful life of the reservoir and dam is probably limited to no more than three hundred years. By A.D. 2283, Lake Powell will have become a delta of mud overgrown with tamarisk jungles, and the dam itself, its penstocks blocked, will be transformed into a splendid waterfall. Good news!” (*One Life* 89).

for future ecosaboteurs to follow (248).⁹⁷ In addition to these practical guides to the intricacies of ecosabotage, the novel provides an ethical framework to which Abbey suggests would-be monkey-wrenchers should adhere. The first and most important rule the eco-raiders establish is that their violence will affect solely inanimate objects, and that under no circumstances will they perpetrate murder (69, 73). Instead, they focus on “The murder of a machine. Deicide” (86)—a task that they believe will begin “to wreak the earth’s vengeance on ... the despoilers of the desert” (94).

Hayduke Lives!, which Abbey hastily wrote while dying of esophageal varices in the late 1980s, extends the already elaborate justification of ecosabotage that he began in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. In the nearly fifteen years that elapsed between these two novels, Abbey witnessed the continued destruction of southwestern deserts and rivers he loved, and he saw the rise of a significant radical environmental group, Earth First!, which his work had inspired. The members of Earth First! explicitly proclaimed that Abbey was their guru and that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* was their Bible.⁹⁸ Although Abbey never formally joined the high-profile Earth First!, he often corresponded with its members; he wrote the preface for the group’s manifesto *Eco-Defense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*; and he even participated in various protests it arranged.

⁹⁷ As I discuss in my introduction, Earth First! members honored Abbey and *The Monkey Wrench Gang* in 1981 by unrolling a hundred-yard long banner down the Glen Canyon Dam which looked eerily like a large crack forming in the dam’s surface. In the years to follow, Dave Foreman, co-founder of Earth First!, built upon Abbey’s work in order to create an actual instruction manual for ecosabotage called *Eco-Defense: A Field Guide to Monkeywrenching*, which functions for ecosaboteurs much as William Powell’s *Anarchist Cookbook* (1971) functions for those interested in perpetrating acts of anarchism. In *Confessions of an Eco-Warrior* (1991), which is part memoir and part manifesto, Foreman says that the goal of Earth First! was “to inspire others to carry out activities straight from the pages of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*” (18).

⁹⁸ Their protests garnered national attention and may have directly resulted in the proposal by then Secretary of the Interior Donald Hodel to destroy the dam and begin restoring the valley to its original state. The removal of the dam has not yet occurred but it is still supported by many environmental groups. For more information about the Earth First! “cracking” of the dam, see Philippon, Daniel J. “Edward Abbey’s Remarks at the Cracking of Glen Canyon Dam” (2004).

Throughout much of his adult life, Abbey's radicalism, particularly his overt promotion of anarchism and ecoterrorism, made him a target of the FBI. From the mid 1940s until his death in 1989, the FBI monitored Abbey's activities, suspecting him of sedition and possible Communist sympathies. His works, particularly the environmentalist cult classics *Desert Solitaire* and *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, heightened the FBI's concern about Abbey, as these texts not only inspired activism but also provided blueprints for how to engage in illegal and often dangerous protests. I have personally contacted the FBI multiple times, requesting the files on Abbey through the Freedom of Information Act. Thus far, the FBI has rejected my requests for Abbey's files, but I am continuing to appeal their rejections. The fact that the FBI will not reveal their files on Abbey further indicates that supposed "ecoterrorism" continues to be a pressing concern of the U.S. government. Notably, following Abbey's death, members of Earth First! and Earth Liberation Front have been closely monitored by the FBI because of their use of Abbey-inspired protest tactics.⁹⁹

In *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Abbey invents a movement, which became a reality with the formation of Earth First! Then, in his final novel, *Hayduke Lives!* Abbey re-fictionalizes this movement in order to critique its shortcomings.¹⁰⁰ In light of this critique, Abbey has much less in common with Earth First! than most scholars tend to assume. Instead, Abbey's fiction and the real-world protests he meant it to inspire should more accurately be aligned with Earth Liberation Front, a group that was far more radical than Earth First! had ever been. By the mid 1980s Earth First! was adopting more conventional tactics, eventually working within the

⁹⁹ See, for example, Marshall Curry's illuminating documentary *If a Tree Fall: A Story of the Earth Liberation Front* (2011).

¹⁰⁰ When Smith goes to Hayduke's hideout, he finds a used copy of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* among a pile of books (179).

confines of legal and civil disobedience—staging protests, blocking bulldozers, chaining themselves to trees, etc. As a result, by the late 1980s, some members of Earth First! became discontented with the group, asserting that it had become too mainstream and that it accomplished little more than political theatre. Therefore, in 1992, Earth Liberation Front formed and since then “the group has claimed responsibility for attacks against property associated with urban sprawl, air pollution, animal testing, genetic engineering, and public lands logging, and has caused an estimated \$100 million in damage” (Vanderheiden 426). Earth Liberation Front rejects the label “ecoterrorism” and instead prefers “economic sabotage” or “ecotage,” which more accurately sums up the group’s philosophy since they go to great lengths to protect humans and seek only “to remove the profit motive from killing the earth and all life on it” (ELF spokesperson, qtd. in Vanderheiden 426).¹⁰¹

Although there is no direct evidence that Abbey’s work catalyzed Earth Liberation Front, I believe that it is probable that *Hayduke Lives!* inspired it in the same way that *The Monkey Wrench Gang* inspired Earth First! In *Hayduke Lives!*, Abbey levels a much harsher critique against Earth First! than critics tend to acknowledge, and the novel’s overwhelming support of ecosabotage anticipates the rise of the twentieth century’s most radical environmental groups. In some ways, though, the novel also undermines its own project to support ecosabotage, and, ironically, it demonstrates the limits of such extreme tactics—limits that we have seen play out in American culture since the early 1990s.

In the opening of *Hayduke Lives!*, Doc and Bonnie have gotten married, had a son, and settled down into a comfortable, middle-class life. In one of the earliest scenes, they watch an

¹⁰¹ In 2005, the FBI identified Earth Liberation Front and Animal Liberation Front as the “number one domestic terrorism threat” (qtd. in Amster 288). This is ironic because neither group has ever been responsible for a single human causality, while other domestic terrorists groups—white supremacists, anti-gay groups, and right-wing fanatics, for example—have been responsible for the deaths of hundreds of Americans (Amster 293; see also Vanderheiden 426).

Earth First! demonstration on TV. Sitting in their suburban home, they have now become spectators rather than the radical activists they were in the conclusion of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Hayduke, who faked his own death in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, is still actively involved in ecosabotage, and, throughout the novel, he attempts to convince Bonnie, Doc, and Smith to rejoin the fight for environmental justice. Initially, for various reasons, they all decline. For instance, when Bonnie explains to Hayduke why she can no longer be involved in his radical and, more importantly, illegal forms of protest, she points out that she is married, has one child, and is pregnant with another: “we just don’t do that kind of thing anymore, we have responsibilities now, though I don’t suppose you could understand that, and we just don’t intend to take chances anymore” (104). She assures Hayduke, though, that they are still involved in the fight for environmental justice: “we write letters. Doc speaks at hearings. We support the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society and Audubon and the neighborhood coalitions and Amnesty International and the ACLU and the NAACP and God only knows what else but we give ten percent, every year. Ten percent” (105). In the time between the narratives of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Hayduke Lives!*, the former eco-raiders, with the exception of Hayduke, have become reform, rather than radical, environmentalists.

The political climate of *Hayduke Lives!* reflects the increase both in environmental destruction and the radicalism with which environmentalists fought this destruction in the decades following the 1970s. Abbey records the cultural and linguistic shift toward defining ecosabotage as an act of domestic “terrorism.” Bonnie, Doc, and Smith are monitored not only by their parole officer but also by the FBI, which is interested in “Who’s behind that Earth First! crowd,” because they see the group’s activism as “Terrorism” (52): “We are not here to deal with your ordinary well-meaning harmless environmentalists. We’re here to root out a gang of

determined, skilled, well-financed international terrorists” (58). Significantly, the word “terrorism” does not appear a single time in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*; yet it comes up repeatedly in *Hayduke Lives!* One of the FBI officers even claims that the members of the eco-raiders are actually “worse than terrorists... Terrorism we understand” (148). The FBI seems to falter in comprehending the motivations of radical environmentalists whose purported “terrorism” stems from ecological concerns rather than the political issues with which the FBI is more familiar. Because of this lack of understanding, Abbey provides in *Hayduke Lives!* a clearer and more concise articulation of the motivations for ecosabotage than he provides in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*. Abbey probably intends this clarification to extend beyond the narrative. He articulates the platform of ecosaboteurs in order to combat perspectives like that of the FBI officers, and he seems to hope that people who do not understand his platform will not automatically assume that it is in some way worse than terrorism. Furthermore, Abbey’s aim in this regard is not merely to explain but also to rally like-minded environmentalists.

The clearest articulation of this platform comes in a chapter entitled “Code of the Eco-Warrior,” in which Doc rhapsodizes about the code of ethics that the eco-warrior should follow.¹⁰² His monologue, which goes on for ten pages, is prompted by Hayduke’s request that Doc reenter the life of the eco-warrior. Ultimately, Doc’s own analyses of the virtues of ecosabotage cause him to re-engage with Hayduke’s purposed work. Like the Earth Liberation Front, the first principle in the “code of the eco-warrior” is a strict policy of non-violence against living things: “The ecological warrior hurts no living thing, absolutely never, and he avoids capture, passing all costs on to them, the Enemy. The point of his work is to increase *their* costs, nudge them toward net loss, bankruptcy, forcing them to withdraw and retreat from their invasion of our public

¹⁰² Between *The Monkey Wrench Gang* and *Hayduke Lives!*, Abbey shifts from referring to the gang as “eco-raiders” to “eco-warriors.” This transition may suggest the increased militancy that Abbey advocated in his final years.

lands, our wilderness, our native and primordial home” (110-11). Such acts of ecosabotage are targeted at “the techno-industrial *ordnung*.” Abbey does not define the enemy in more specific terms than this; his obsession with technocracy is often ambiguous, and it generally relies upon a highly romanticized Ludditism.¹⁰³

Furthermore, Doc asserts that the “code of the eco-warrior” is built upon a nonhierarchical approach to authority that he labels anarchic:

Avoiding organization and all forms of networking, operating strictly on anarchic principles of democratic *decentralism*, the eco-warrior must also be a man or woman of heroic dedication to the work. Not fanatic dedication—no place for fanatics here—but heroic dedication. Because the eco-warrior must do his or her work without hope of fame or glory or even public recognition, at least for the present. The eco-warrior is anonymous, mysterious, unknown to any but his few if any chosen comrades. He wears no uniform, is awarded no medals, is granted no privileges of rank. Not only does he win no taste of personal fame, he must expect the opposite, namely and to wit, public obloquy and vilification...(111)

This public vilification, Doc makes clear, will also come from mainstream, reform environmentalists and governmental agencies: “the official conservation societies and wilderness clubs and wilderness federations and defenders of fur-bearers and national resource defense councils [will] scramble and scurry to place maximum distance between themselves and you, insisting that they deplore your work” (112).

Despite Doc’s repeated insistence on nonviolence, this commitment is broken multiple times throughout *Hayduke Lives!*, and several people in the novel are killed as a result of the eco-

¹⁰³ For an analysis on the relationship between Abbey and Ludditism, see Paul Lindholdt’s “Rage against the Machine: Edward Abbey and Neo-Luddite Thought” (1998).

raiders acts of ecosabotage. The first killing is perpetrated not by one of the four original members of the gang, but rather by Jack Burns (also known as the “Lone Ranger”), another eco-raider who has been working with Hayduke in the absence of the other three gang members. As the gang is attempting to destroy an enormous dragline machine called Goliath that is capable of unprecedented environmental destruction, they are confronted by a security guard, whom Jack Burns shoots and kills while trying to mimic the Lone Ranger. Many critics have discussed this killing. Daniel J. Philippon, among others, disregards the argument that Abbey betrays his principle of nonviolence in *Hayduke Lives!*: “That Jack Burns would kill [the security guard] by accident in an attempt to replicate art [i.e. the Lone Ranger] could perhaps also be seen as a final warning by Abbey about the dangers of taking *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, or any fiction, too seriously. It need not, in other words, repudiate rule number one of the ‘Code of the Eco-Warrior’” (259). By contrast, other scholars, including Don Scheese, argue that the murder of the security guard “suggests that near the end of his life Abbey was more radical than he had been about the means by which wilderness is to be defended” (317). Lindholdt even comes close to contending that the use of violence is justified because of the increased environmental degradation in the region: “the stakes had changed greatly between the publication of the first book in 1975 and its sequel fifteen years later; forces of technocracy, devastating the West at a rapid pace, had reached fantastic proportions, as exemplified by the futuristic GOLIATH dragline, thus mandating the tactics of full-blown revolutionary violence” (115).

While I agree with Scheese’s assertion that Abbey was more radical in the last years of his life and with Lindholdt’s suggestion that Abbey likely thought this killing was a necessary evil in a broader war, I maintain that it is dangerous and unjustifiable to promote murder regardless of how extreme the conditions may have become, especially since the killing of the

security guard is not the only killing in the novel. Critics tend to ignore the fact that as Hayduke is making his escape after the successful destruction of Goliath, he kills both Hoyle and Doyle, two FBI officers who had been pursuing him (303). After Hayduke kills these two, a third officer rather inexplicably commits suicide. Although the latter officer's motivation for his suicide is left ambiguous, Hayduke is perhaps at least inadvertently responsible for this fourth death because the officer was ashamed of failing his mission and losing his fellow officers (304-05).

The circumstances surrounding the destruction of the Goliath further reveal both the limits of Abbey's most radical ecosabotage and his harsh critique of Earth First! Many critics have argued that Abbey's depiction of Earth First! is positive, if at times a bit parodic; for example, Payne asserts "Earth First! is sympathetically portrayed in *Hayduke Lives!*" (204). To me, however, Abbey's portrayal of Earth First! is far from sympathetic, particularly in his descriptions of the group's rallies. In attendance at these rallies is a professor named Bernie Mushkin who incessantly heckles the other attendees. In doing so, he provides several strong counterarguments to the Earth First! movement, and he undermines the possibility of Earth First! looking purely heroic in the novel. For example, he says, "Your well-publicized advocacy of sabotage and monkey-wrenching has made Earth First! a synonym for terrorism" (202). He also says that the flags at the Earth First! meeting display "the basically macho, redneck, sexist, violence-prone frontiersman mentality of your Earth First! image makers" (204). Mushkin even attacks the idea of deep ecology, which is touted throughout the Earth First! rallies, claiming that deep ecology "is basically anti-human misanthropic people-hating bigotry. Not philosophy but bigotry. Biocentric, you call it, or eco-centric. I call it *eccentric*, in the most vicious sense of that term" (203). The de facto leader of Earth First!, a young woman named Erika, dismisses Mushkin's counterarguments before even attempting to engage with his ideas (206); instead, she

simply continues to deliver hackneyed environmental rhetoric, including the ubiquitous phrase, “Down with Empire, up with Spring!”

In addition to being unwilling or unable to engage in dialogue about the political and philosophical ramifications of their platform, the members of Earth First! fail to stage effective protests. For instance, in order to stop Goliath, the Earth First! members plan a peaceful protest in which they sit down in front of the “megamachine” and block its path through the desert (207). Hayduke criticizes Earth First!, claiming that they are just a bunch of ineffectual “kooks” (210), whose attempts at civil disobedience will inevitably fail:

They arrest you for anything. Anything. Disturbing the peace. Obstructing Giant Earth Mover traffic. Hanging flowers and sticking stickers on the dragline bucket. Damaging private property. Any old thing will do, anything to make more trouble, give the cops an excuse to manhandle some good-lookin’ women, make the demonstrators pay fines and hire lawyers and serve time in the county slammer, same old fuckin’ crap, you know the story. You ever in your life see a situation so bad the cops couldn’t make it worse? (111)

In this passage, Hayduke articulates his justification for resorting to ecosabotage when fighting environmental colonialism. Hayduke’s logic suggests that if civil disobedience is impotent when deployed against corrupt governing organizations, then ecosabotage becomes the only conceivably effective protest tactic. In doing so, Abbey ironically makes the inspirational leader of this movement, Hayduke, disparage those he inspired. The other members of the monkey wrench gang also support the arguments against the tactics of Earth First! When asked if he thinks Earth First! will last as a movement, Doc says, “Like the I.W.W. ... they’ll last until they become effective. Then the state moves in, railroads some of the leaders into prison, murders a

few others for educational purposes, clubs and gasses and jails the followers and *voilà!*—peace and order restored” (230).¹⁰⁴ At the end of the novel, Abbey demonstrates that this assessment was correct in that the Earth First! protesters are violently attacked and disbanded by the police. After Earth First! has proven wholly ineffective in combating the megamachine, the ecosaboteurs then have to save the day, and they are able to do so precisely because they are willing to commit crimes and engage in violent behaviors. Because the gang commits multiple murders and consequently succeeds in destroying Goliath, the narrative strongly suggests that only the violent forms of protest enacted by the monkey wrench gang, not those of Earth First!, are effective. Thus, the tactics Abbey valorizes in the novel are much closer to those of Earth Liberation Front than those of Earth First!, and his hero’s approval of violence against humans signifies that Abbey was actually far more radical even than Earth Liberation Front has been to date.

There are, of course, many counterarguments to the acts of protest and vandalism contemplated (and sometimes enacted) by Abbey and Earth Liberation Front.¹⁰⁵ For example, according to Philippon, Abbey “simplifies the complex forces at work in Western land conflicts” in order to create a “clearly defined enemy living in a black-and-white world—bad guys to be fought by good guys” (162). Also, the anarchic destruction of the so-called symbols of progress—roads, bridges, pipelines, and, most importantly, dams—disrupts the lives and livelihoods of the working classes as well as the intended targets, private land developers and governmental agencies. In addition, ecosabotage disregards the democratic processes of

¹⁰⁴ I.W.W. refers to the international union, the Industrial Workers of the World, which formed in 1905. In the U.S., the government was partially responsible for dismantling the I.W.W. because the union was perceived to be too close to socialism, communism, and anarchism during the First Red Scare between the World Wars.

¹⁰⁵ For example, Abbey sawed down billboards in 1959, and he destroyed bulldozers in Utah in 1975 in protest of the building of Route 95 (5).

discussion, compromise, and majority rule and instead buttresses potentially reckless forms of vigilante justice, which may in turn prevent the work of mainstream environmentalists and give environmentalism in general a negative reputation. Even if they adopt a strict policy against violence, a group practicing ecosabotage could always be co-opted by people less inclined to adhere to the group's principles, or the group could be drawn into violence by extenuating circumstances: "Historically, clandestine groups that employ limited violence have experienced difficulty in maintaining their principled opposition to the expansion of that violence, and have as a consequence crossed the lines separating the defensible from the criminal" (Vanderheiden 445). Because of these inherent limits in the platform of ecosabotage, Payne argues that Abbey's work may have been ineffective and may have even caused more harm than good: "In fact, if judged by the usual standards: influencing environmental reform legislation; attracting widespread public support for environmental causes; or persuading the government to set aside wilderness areas for protection, it might be argued that Abbey's impact was negligible—perhaps even, as some have suggested, counterproductive" (205). Likely due to these limitations, most fringe or radical environmental groups—even Earth First!—often come to adopt more conventional tactics, eventually working within the confines of legal and civil disobedience.¹⁰⁶

Furthermore, Abbey's advocacy of anarchism and ecosabotage may not have been well founded, because environmental protection has proven to be most effective with the assistance of an extensive body of laws and a government to enforce those laws. Environmental historian

¹⁰⁶ In at least one instance, Abbey does articulate a productive way to combat dams. He suggests that the U.S. should develop more alternative fuels, particularly solar, so that as our energy needs diminish, we can consider dismantling dams. Abbey states that when this happens, the canyons will be littered with much trash and debris, but he says nature will soon rebound and eventually the ecosystem will once again thrive: "Within a generation—thirty years—I predict the river and canyons will bear a decent resemblance to their former selves. Within the lifetime of our children Glen Canyon and the living river, heart of the canyonlands, will be restored to us. The wilderness will again belong to God, the people and the wild things that call it home" (*Beyond the Wall* 103).

Donald Worster argues that societies that have functioned most sustainably throughout history have observed strict regulations regarding humans' use of the natural world:

They have made rules, and many of them, rules based on intimate local experience, to govern their behavior. They have not tried to 'live free' of nature or of the group; nor have they resented restraints on individual initiative or left it to each individual to decide completely how to behave. On the contrary, they have accepted many kinds of limits on themselves and enforced them on one another ... having these rules and enforcing them vigorously seems to be a requirement for long-term ecological survival. ("Nature and the Disorder of History" 80-81)

Given that Abbey tends to link a lawless wilderness experience with his own ability to attain freedom and identity, he would obviously not agree with Worster's assertion of the value of strict regulations in environmental initiatives. However, Worster's historical survey suggests that Abbey's platform not only would fail to work in the present but also that it has consistently failed in the past.

Because the logic undergirding Abbey's anarchism and ecosabotage is so tenuous, some scholars have begun to argue that his work can be dangerous. For example, Douglas Brinkley asserts, "*The Monkey Wrench Gang* is far more than just a controversial book—it is revolutionary, anarchic, seditious, and, in the wrong hands, dangerous" (xx).¹⁰⁷ But what are the possible ramifications of reading this potentially "dangerous" book? What are the particular dangers, for example, in teaching a novel like *The Monkey Wrench Gang* to high school or

¹⁰⁷ Killingsworth argues, "Wilderness and freedom may have appealed more strongly in the years of compulsory military service, resonating with the built-up resentment of people whose lives had been limited and irreparably traumatized by war. And with the waning of the Cold War, and more especially with the end of the draft and the professionalization of the military, the left leaning anarchism of a figure like Edward Abbey may come to seem dated and even dangerous to a new generation" (27).

college students? If the novel is not interpreted with rigorous criticism, can it provide a model for future would-be ecoterrorists?¹⁰⁸ In the nearly fifty years since Abbey began disseminating his environmental worldview, he has undoubtedly inspired several radical environmental groups. Although Earth Liberation Front, for example, has destroyed over 100 million dollars in property, they have never reportedly been responsible for a single human casualty. Therefore, the most imminent danger these groups pose is not to people but to property. For this reason, Gary Snyder predicts that the film adaptation of *The Monkey Wrench Gang* will never be made, despite Abbey being paid a large sum of money for the movie rights. Snyder says the novel “violates the most sacred American value: industrial private property” (qtd. in Buell, “What Is” 160).¹⁰⁹

While the facets of Abbey’s work most often deemed radical—his promotion of anarchism and ecosabotage—are sometimes problematic and objectionable to many, his work possesses many positive attributes as well, and these are arguably even more radical. While Abbey undoubtedly intended to inspire ecosabotage, particularly the destruction of the Glen Canyon Dam, one must also acknowledge that he has been read by thousands of Americans, and

¹⁰⁸ A recent article published in *Elle* illustrates the way in which avowedly nonviolent radical environmentalists can eventually become comfortable with protest tactics that would harm humans. In “The Believers,” Andrea Todd investigates the story of Anna, a college student whom the FBI recruited to infiltrate a group of anarchists and radical environmentalists. Anna lived with the group—including Eric McDavid, Zachary Jenson, and Lauren Weiner—as they planned several acts of ecosabotage, all of which were probably affiliated with Earth Liberation Front. In particular, the group was planning to blow up the Nimbus Dam, which created a 7,000-acre lake in California. With Anna’s help, the FBI arrested McDavid, Jenson, and Weiner while they were purchasing bomb materials at a Kmart. Although there was much debate among experts at their trial as to whether the dam’s destruction would result in the loss of human life, the important aspect of the case to consider for the present argument is that at least one member of the group, McDavid, was comfortable with the possibility of human casualties as long as the river’s natural hydrology was restored. The FBI recorded a debate the group had over the loss of life, in which McDavid says, “Well, if it happens, it happens. It’s collateral damage” (324). Because of this statement, McDavid was convicted “on charges of conspiracy to commit arson against government property,” and he was sentenced to nearly twenty years in prison. Anna reported that McDavid threatened to kill her on at least two occasions, and she claimed that since her involvement in the group’s arrest became widely known, she has received death threats, even on message boards for Earth Liberation Front.

¹⁰⁹ Snyder’s prediction may not be true for much longer. Directors Henry Joost and Ariel Schulman are now reportedly working on a film adaptation of *The Monkey Wrench Gang*.

that most of them have not engaged in ecosabotage as a result of reading his work. Abbey's more profound effect on his readers has been to augment their environmental responsiveness. Abbey's deconstruction of anthropocentrism—not his support of anarchism or ecosabotage—is the most radical legacy of his literature and likely its greatest contribution to American environmental thinking. In what remains of this chapter, I will consider the personal and political ramifications of Abbey's relationalist, ecocentric philosophy. Then, to conclude, I will discuss Abbey's broader contributions to postmodernist nature writing.

Throughout much of his fiction and nonfiction, Abbey asserts that the wilderness is necessary for the psychological health of the nation. For example, in *Desert Solitaire*, he claims that “wilderness complements and completes civilization... We need wilderness whether or not we ever set foot in it. We need a refuge even though we may never need to go there... We need the possibility of escape as surely as we need hope; without it the life of the cities would drive all men into crime or drugs or psychoanalysis” (129-30). Similarly, in *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, Doc says,

The wilderness once offered men a plausible way of life... Now it functions as a psychiatric refuge. Soon there will be no wilderness... Soon there will be no place to go. Then the madness becomes universal... And the universe goes mad... We are caught ... in the iron treads of a technological juggernaut. A mindless machine... A planetary industrialism ... growing like a cancer. (63-64)

Abbey's work is not only an anarchist's or ecosaboteur's call to action; it is also a call to environmental bonding, as Abbey sought to impress upon the American public the need to protect the natural world for both their mental and their physical health. For these reasons,

Abbey is invested first and foremost in introducing “the reader to the desert as *desert*, not as linguistic description” (Philippon 238). This is, of course, a nearly impossible task in the poststructuralist critical climate in which we find ourselves, and Abbey certainly recognizes this poststructuralist dilemma. But he is equally engaged in demonstrating the need to keep the natural world wild, rather than domesticated and homogenized, in order to maintain a sense of nature as other. Lawrence Buell notes that an anthropocentric, or homocentric, perspective prevents people from engaging the natural world directly, and that in literature this often renders the natural world merely a metaphor for particular facets of human culture (*The Environmental* 5). Abbey’s environmental philosophy is not necessarily new; it is, however, radical. Echoing Thoreau, John Muir, and Aldo Leopold, Abbey’s platform is anti-anthropocentric in that he rejects the notion that humans are the center of the universe and that humans can and should use the natural world however they see fit. Thus, it would be productive to extend Buell’s interpretation of Thoreau in *The Environmental Imagination* to an analysis Abbey; like Thoreau’s works, Abbey’s also serve “as a record and model of a western sensibility working with and through the constraints of Eurocentric, androcentric, homocentric culture to arrive at an environmentally responsive vision” (23).

This “environmentally responsive vision” often occurs after a confrontation with what may most accurately be labeled the ecological sublime. Despite the fact that sublime theory, particularly in the Kantian tradition, has largely fallen out of critical favor in recent years, it can still be usefully applied to contemporary conversations about deep ecology and environmental ethics. In particular, sublime theory can be employed to augment ecocritical interpretations of artistic productions because of its emphasis on identity formation in relation to the environment. In “Toward an Ecological Sublime,” Christopher Hitt warns that the sublime should not be

wholly rejected because of its potentially “maleficent” ideologies: “On the contrary,” he says, “I believe the concept of the sublime offers a unique opportunity for the realization of a new, more responsible perspective on our relationship with the natural environment” (605). Hitt reminds the reader that the sublime has historically embodied a contradiction because it simultaneously includes “*both* humbling fear *and* ennobling validation of the perceiving subject” (606). Hitt notes that the latter facet of the sublime experience has generally received the most attention but that the former is equally important and was emphasized even in early theorizations of the sublime, such as those by Edmund Burke and Kant.¹¹⁰

Hitt’s argument is ultimately that the “humbling fear” of the sublime can inspire the realization that humans are subject to and dependent on the forces of the natural world. While the final phases of the Kantian sublime result in the abrogation of the natural world, Hitt argues that the sublime experience also has “the power to jolt us momentarily out of a perspective constructed by reason and language, a perspective that, in modern Western culture, has rendered nature mute” (617). Hitt’s desire to engage the natural world directly is very similar to the desire Abbey records in *Desert Solitaire*:

¹¹⁰ Many scholars believe Longinus to be the first to popularize notions of the sublime; however, while Longinus is chiefly concerned with the sublime experience that is achieved through an engagement with a literary work (78), Edmund Burke broadens Longinus’s conception of the sublime to include a range of possible catalysts including real landscapes. For Burke, catalysts for the sublime experience include not only the rhetorical sublime but also encounters with “Whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible” (305). Thus, Burke’s sublime objects are often facets of nature, which engender fear or “the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling” (305). Kant furthers this conception of the sublime, saying that the sublime object is “*absolutely great*” or “*great beyond comparison*” (387). During the Kantian sublime experience, an individual confronts an object, usually within nature, that is so vast that the senses and the imagination are incapable of comprehending it (386). The sublime experience can result in the individual’s transcendence of self-consciousness into a higher consciousness if one possesses the faculty of mind to assert the dominance of reason over both the terrifying sublime object and the relative impotence of the senses and imagination. Kant states that “we willingly call these objects sublime, because they raise the energies of the soul above the accustomed height and discover in us a faculty of resistance of a quite different kind, which gives us the courage to measure ourselves against the apparent almightiness of nature” (390). Thus, the “rational faculty” is capable of overcoming the “insufficiency of our [sensuous and imaginative] faculties” and then asserting “a superiority to nature” (390-91).

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

The reference to Kant in this passage is by no means haphazard; Abbey's passing allusion critiques a distinctly Kantian version of the sublime. In *The Romantic Sublime: Studies in the Structure and Psychology of Transcendence* (1976), Thomas Weiskel argues that there are two types of sublime experience: the *negative sublime*, as theorized by Kant, and the *positive sublime*, as articulated by the American Transcendentalists. In experiencing the negative sublime, individuals confront something greater than themselves, often within the natural world. As a result, they are reduced to feelings of insignificance, which can be overcome solely by asserting the faculty of reason over the sublime object. Regardless of whether the end result is the feeling of insignificance or the illusion of omnipotence, the distribution of power is always grossly unequal: either humans dominate the natural world through the use of their intellect, or the natural world renders humans impotent by impressing upon them feelings of utter insignificance.

By contrast, the positive sublime provides a means of transcending the anthropocentrism that commonly derives from the Kantian model. In experiencing the positive sublime, individuals confront the magnitude of the sublime object, and instead of feeling insignificant, they transcend current conceptions of self and discern the unity of the environment, of which the individual is a part. According to Weiskel, during the positive sublime moment, “the phenomenal or sensible ego is aggrandized in place of the self-recognition of the noumenal reason. But Kantian terms are not quite adequate, for this is a ‘positive’ sublime that in the end would subsume all otherness, all possibility of negation” (49). Rather than an unequal distribution of power that derives from the sense of otherness inherent in the negative sublime, the positive sublime ideally results in a sense of oneness between the environment and the mind, and each functions to aggrandize the other. Emerson’s famous passage in “Nature” (1836) about the “transparent eyeball” is a key example of the positive sublime, as Emerson rhapsodizes, “I am nothing; I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or parcel of God” (1518). Buell argues that this type of merging with the environment represents an “aesthetic of relinquishment” that has been a long-standing fascination for American writers: “The more radical relinquishment is to give up individual autonomy itself, to forgo the illusion of mental and even bodily apartness from one’s environment” (*The Environmental* 144).

In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey not only experiences this sense of merging with the natural world, but he also discovers that the entire biosphere is itself a vast interconnected network. Significantly, this discovery is engendered by Abbey’s study of the hydrology of the region. In one of the earliest descriptions of the desert, he states, “At first look it all seems like a geologic chaos, but there is method at work here, method of a fanatic order and perseverance: each groove in the rock leads to a natural channel of some kind, every channel to a ditch and gulch and

ravine, each larger waterway to a canyon bottom or broad wash leading in turn to the Colorado River and the sea” (10). This passage recalls several other works that I have discussed throughout this dissertation, most notably Pare Lorentz’s *The River*, Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, and Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle*. As in these earlier works, water, more than any other element in the natural world, conveys the idea that the earth is a system of networks. Abbey’s friend Jack Loeffler supports this interpretation in claiming that “Abbey loved the natural world, or wilderness. He loved it for its own sake. His refined sense of egalitarianism extended far beyond the realm of man to include all species of fauna *and* flora, and even beyond that to include the rocks, the air, the water. He perceived everything to be part of a whole” (Loeffler 47). The idea that all facets of the natural world, both the human and the nonhuman, are interconnected suggests that Abbey, like Carson and Vonnegut before him, possessed a hydrocentric understanding of networks that resulted in a philosophy prescient of deep ecology.

In many of his works, Abbey articulates a philosophy similar to Naess’s “biospherical egalitarianism,” which extends the inherent right to life to all nonhuman forms of life (95-96). In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey states, “I prefer not to kill animals. I’m a humanist; I’d rather kill a *man* than a snake” (17). Later, he says, “We are obliged, therefore, to spread the news, painful and bitter though it may be for some to hear, that all living things on earth are kindred” (21). In *Hayduke Lives!*, which was written more than a decade and a half after Naess’s coining of the term “deep ecology,” Erika, the leader of Earth First! in the novel, is said to have “the mind of Arne Naess” (187). Fittingly, when they spike trees, Earth First! is “preserving those living breathing respirating trees whose right to continued existence is at least as legitimate as that of any other creature including, but not limited to, humans” (129).

Many of Abbey's works also reveal a conception of relationalism long before Naess made the neologism so well known among environmental thinkers. For both Naess and Abbey, this relational perspective breaks down the barriers between the human ego and the environment, and ideally results in humans' increased concern over the wellbeing of nonhuman forms of life. For example, in *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey says, "I discovered that I was not opposed to mankind but only to mancenteredness, anthropocentricity, the opinion that the world exists solely for the sake of man; not to science, which means simply knowledge, but to science misapplied, to the worship of technique and technology, and to that perversion of science properly called scientism; and not to civilization but to culture" (244). This relationalism can in turn lead to a biocentric or ecocentric ethical system that assigns intrinsic value to all forms of life: "Generally speaking, a biocentric, or life-centered, ethic attributes value either to individual organisms or to entire species, while an ecocentric, or system-centered, ethic attributes value to individual ecosystems or to the entire ecosphere" (Philippon 20). Thus, the ethics of the ecological sublime, developed through the confrontation of the sublime object and the negotiation of the network, accepts the interconnectedness of all things and necessitates the interdependency of all things. By this logic, which takes as its model radical deep ecology, humans should protect both human and nonhuman communities, for all facets of these communities are related—a concept that Abbey seems to develop when observing the hydrological systems of his beloved West.

Abbey's notion of environmental egalitarianism and relationalism underscores anthropocentricism, and it challenges capitalism's model of infinite growth.¹¹¹ In doing so, Abbey's work may accomplish something even more radical than the anarchism and ecosabotage

¹¹¹ Lears states, "From this view, capitalists are driven to press outward in space and forward in time, in search of new ways to accumulate capital by reinvesting their surplus in new productive enterprises. Spatial expansion produces the acquisition of empire—new resources to transform into commodities, new settings for the absorption of surplus capital" (87).

that he hoped to inspire. Abbey's platform provides an alternative to a capitalist ideology—"Growth for the sake of growth"—which he argues is ultimately motivated by the greed that is an inherent part of the American Dream: "Furthermore the whole grandiose structure is self-destructive: by enshrining the profit motive (power) as our guiding ideal, we encourage the intensive and accelerating consumption of land, air, water—the natural world—on which the structure depends for its continued existence" (*One Life*, "A Theory of Anarchy" 28). McKibben argues that Abbey's condemnation of the American Dream, rather than his radical environmental philosophies, is what many individuals object to when reading his work: "We Americans can deal with someone who contends that he looks forward to the buzzards picking clean his bones; but what about someone who says, as Abbey does, that we must 'curtail our gluttonous appetite for things, ever more things, learn to moderate our needs'" (16-17). Thus, Abbey disrupts postwar Americans' peace of mind by suggesting that an alternative life may be more fulfilling, and the alternative life he proposes does not resemble stereotypical depictions of the American Dream (McKibben 17).

Abbey convincingly demonstrates that fighting against capitalism's model of infinite growth is imperative because it threatens the natural world, while also undermining individual and national conceptions of identity that rely upon the ontological connections among nature, culture, and subjectivity. Moreover, Abbey's obsession with water and its connectivity demonstrates the deep ecological foundations of network theory. His investment in these issues provides another example of how pervasive they were throughout the 1960s and 1970s, for the same understanding of networks that we see in Abbey's works was also present in the works of Carson and Vonnegut that I discussed in Chapter I. Although the radicalism that Abbey advocated has largely waned in contemporary environmental politics, the theories of networks

that were developed in conjunction with this radical hydrocentric environmentalism continue to inform contemporary network theory, which seeks to understand the nonhierarchical, rhizomatic interactions of human and nonhuman systems. For Abbey, degradation of the environment detracts from humans' potential to experience an elemental connection with a nonhuman other—an encounter that he contends can have deleterious ontological ramifications.

One objection contemporary readers may raise to Abbey's environmental philosophy is that environmental bonding both firsthand and through the mediating lens of artistic productions has been problematized in modernist and postmodernist art and criticism. In particular, poststructuralist critics maintain that the world cannot be experienced or apprehended except through the lenses of cultural and linguistic systems. Claire Lawrence explains the linguistic component of this theory using the work of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce: "Saussure identifies the basic structure of language as the relationship between signifier (the name of an object) and signified (the idea of the object). Peirce adds to the equation the referent (the object itself). The signifier and the signified together make up the sign; the referent exists outside of the signifying system" (152). Therefore, if human experience is mediated by linguistic systems, "it is impossible to apprehend an object *except through a system of representation*" (152). The problem that many nature writers and ecocritics have with poststructuralist linguistics is that it can efface material reality by focusing so much attention on textual representations. However, poststructuralists do not wholly deny the existence of an extratextual reality; however, the ruptures between subject and object as well as between word and object remain a problem for environmentally minded writers: "The fear this move seems to reveal is that if in the poststructuralist model the real is not something that can be pointed to, touched, tasted, or owned, then it is also *not* something that can be saved from overpopulation, pollution, and

degradation” (Lawrence 155). Jean Baudrillard multiplies the distance between human perception and external reality by arguing that culture and ideology interrupt the connection between individuals and the natural world. Lawrence explains that Baudrillard “does not deny the existence of nature in the original... He just realizes and, like a good postmodernist, revels in the fact that any encounter we might have with the desert is culturally overdetermined” (156). This over-determination problematizes the notion that humans could ever engage with the natural world directly without the simultaneous presence of culture.

Buell argues that literary theory and criticism tend to train readers to highlight and investigate the gaps and distinctions between texts and referents (*The Environmental* 10). However, such hermeneutical apparatuses can distance the reader and referent and, by extension, the individual and natural world; therefore, he asks, “Must literature always lead us away from the physical world, never back to it?” (11). To address this question, Buell stresses the idea that writing about nature can process “the experience of contact with a particular place,” while also being “culturally mediated”: “The one must acknowledge that reported contacts with particular settings are intertextually, intersocially constructed; the other must acknowledge that the nonbuilt environment is one of the variables that influence culture, text, and personality” (13). Thus, Buell calls for a more “ambidextrous response” to the questions of inhabiting and representing nature, culture, and the fluid boundaries between nature and culture. This approach avoids reductive interpretations “at the level of formal representation, such as to compel us to believe either that the text replicates the object-world or that it creates an entirely distinct linguistic world,” as well as reductive interpretations “at the ideational level, such as to require us to believe that the environment ought to be considered either the major subject of concern or merely a mystification of some other interest” (13). In *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey himself employs an approach to

linguistics that is similar to what Buell calls the “ambidextrous response” to how environmental experiences are both culturally and linguistically mediated. For example, in his introduction, Abbey states, “Since you cannot get the desert into a book any more than a fisherman can haul up the sea with his nets, I have tried to create a world of words in which the desert figures more as medium than as material. Not imitation but evocation has been the goal” (xii). Throughout the memoir, Abbey acknowledges that “Words fail” (162) when he attempts to record the landscapes of the Southwest. Additionally, Abbey notes that the words of others also fail to depict the natural world and may even detract from the environmental experience he craves: “Here I am relaxing into memories of ancient books—a surefire sign of spiritual fatigue. That screen of words, that veil of ideas, issuing from the brain like a sort of mental smog that keeps getting between a man and the world, obscuring vision” (184).

Abbey argues that the very act of naming natural spaces distances people from those places and makes it far more difficult to experience any form of environmental bonding. Discussing how problematic naming the spires, buttes, and mesas of the desert can be, he says,

Through naming comes knowing, we grasp an object, mentally, by giving it a name—hension, prehension, apprehension. And thus through language create a whole world, corresponding to the other world out there. Or we trust that it corresponds. Or perhaps, like a German poet, we cease to care, becoming more concerned with the naming than with the things named; the former becomes more real than the latter. And so in the end the world is lost again. No, the world remains—those unique, particular, incorrigibly individual junipers and sandstone monoliths—and it is we who are lost. Again. Round and round, through the endless labyrinth of thought—the maze. (257)

This passage evokes two distinct but related projects contained in *Desert Solitaire*. First, Abbey is interested in attempting to represent the natural world in his writing, all the while knowing that he cannot do so. The second project that Abbey sets for himself is to catalyze a merging with the environment, which he seems to succeed in doing, particularly in his encounters with sublime forces related to or engendered by hydrological systems, most notably the Colorado River, which he describes in vivid detail in the chapter entitled “Down the River.” Therefore, even if he is unable to record the experience in a satisfying way because of the inability of language to capture reality, he does not indicate that his desire for environmental merging has been a complete failure. Lawrence argues that in *Desert Solitaire* Abbey is more alienated in the end than he was in the beginning, because his project of merging has failed: “In pointing out the difficulty of ‘getting the desert into a book,’ Abbey makes a statement about the inadequacy of signifying systems when it comes to reproducing the real; he realizes from the start that ‘evocation’ is all that can be striven for. Writer, reader, and word are all alienated from the referent” (158). I wonder, though, if Lawrence exaggerates Abbey’s alienation. Although Abbey freely admits that language cannot represent nature, his memoir is simultaneously a call to readers to experience the natural world themselves. Additionally, as I have demonstrated, his works function as rallying cries for future ecosaboteurs who would, like Abbey himself, protect the nation’s natural spaces. Abbey says, “most of what I write about in this book is already gone or going under fast. This is not a travel guide but an elegy. A memorial. You’re holding a tombstone in your hands. A bloody rock. Don’t drop it on your foot—throw it at something big and glassy. What do you have to lose?” (xiv).

Furthermore, Abbey’s complex linguistic explorations in the introduction to *Desert Solitaire* indicate the distinctly postmodern turn that Abbey’s writing signals in the wider body

of postwar nature writing. Several recent scholars have argued for positioning Abbey as a thoroughly postmodern writer.¹¹² Lawrence, for instance, contends that Abbey approaches the problem of representation in a “postmodern manner”: “Abbey is very interested in troubling the connection between sign and referent, word and object, and like Derrida he sees this as a political act, a way to disrupt recalcitrant ideologies that are embedded in discourse” (156). In “Biocentrism and Green Existentialism: Edward Abbey’s Conflicting Conceptualizations of Nature,” Werner Bigell is similarly intent on establishing Abbey as a postmodern writer. He accomplishes this by demonstrating that Abbey’s deployment of biocentrism and existentialism, which are seemingly contradictory, can be reconciled as a playfully postmodernist self-contradiction.¹¹³ Bigell asserts that Abbey’s works often deconstruct themselves with these two competing philosophies: “The biocentrist perspective is corroded with a comic outlook, and the bleakness of the existential outlook is counteracted by an affirmation of the importance [and equality] of life” (285).¹¹⁴ While Abbey’s work can usefully be linked to 1960s and 1970s postmodernism, it also retains distinctly romantic elements, and Abbey seems unique in his desire to harness simultaneously the existential idea of the meaninglessness of the natural world and the romantic idea of kinship with the natural world (Bigell 291-92). At times, there is a surprising dearth of discussion about the natural world in postmodern and poststructuralist

¹¹² One theorist who would likely disagree with the idea that Abbey is so thorough postmodern is Dana Philips. In his essay “Is Nature Necessary?” Philips argues that in literature “the essence of postmodernist sport... occurs in a simulated plenum, where nature is smoke-sparkle, rather than red in tooth and claw. Representation has supplanted presence” (206). By this definition, Abbey may not be considered postmodern, because, unlike many postmodern writers, he still presents encounters with an unmodified natural world that is very much red in tooth and claw.

¹¹³ Nadel states, “Like the narratives it authorized and the nuclear family it valorized, containment culture was thus a product of large, unstable elements—nuclei radiating their detritus. Accumulating to critical mass by the mid-1960s, the narratives of containment eventually split one another asunder, contaminating the slogans of the cold war and the clichés of the modernist academy. The aftermath, its fractured frames of reference, its infinite regression of half-lives, its proliferation of contaminated sites, its bounty of waste, can be called American postmodernism” (xi-xii).

¹¹⁴ Scheese also argues that Abbey’s work represents a new facet of the genre of nature writing, because “committing an illegal act against the government transforms the work that tells of it into a truly subversive, revolutionary genre” (316).

criticism. James Applewhite argues that the word “nature” is rarely taken seriously in poststructuralist criticism because of its inevitable association with romanticism: “The reputation of *nature* and *the natural* as theoretical and critical terms is undermined most deeply by the continuing modernist prejudice against romantic associations. Part of the liability of postmodernism is its inheritance, from modernism, of a failure to evaluate romanticism properly” (14). Abbey explicitly refers to Romanticism and romantic depictions of the natural world several times throughout *Desert Solitaire*. For example, he notes that the “wilderness invokes nostalgia, a justified not merely sentimental nostalgia for the lost America our forefathers knew” (166-67). However, he warns against the wholesale rejection of this nostalgia merely because it may appear overly romantic to readers in the late 1960s: “Romance—but not to be dismissed on that account. The romantic view, while not the whole of the truth, is a necessary part of the whole truth.” Elsewhere in *Desert Solitaire*, Abbey notes that the “Romantic Movement” represents a “great expansion of human consciousness . . . which opened up for men a whole new world of truth, [and has] been explored and celebrated, strenuously if not adequately, by swarms of poets, novelists, scientists and frost-bitten inarticulate (‘because it’s there’) mountain climbers” (239). Ever playful to the point of being contradictory, Abbey later refers to such feelings as “that gallant infirmity of the soul called romance”—an “infirmity” that he says is impossible to keep at bay when confronted with the sublime power and beauty of desert landscapes (243). If postmodernism often corresponds with a continuation of the postromantic sentiment that emerged so prominently during the period of high modernism, then Abbey’s work is particularly significant in advancing a neo-romanticism that is simultaneously postmodernist.

Throughout this dissertation, I have tried to demonstrate that throughout U.S. history, Americans’ self-definition has been linked to their interactions with the natural world. Because

postwar ecologists became increasingly aware that water connected vast ecological networks, water-related metaphors in fiction and film enabled narratives about the interdependencies between human and nonhuman communities. My analysis of these metaphors reveals the extent to which environmental consciousness affected both individual and national identity formation. Edward Abbey was among the first of this transitional generation to be able to hold seemingly contradictory impulses in mind, simultaneously admitting the ways in which the experience of the natural world is culturally and linguistically mediated, while also summoning the desire and even the possibility of merging with the nonhuman world.

CODA:

Environmental Justice and the Globalization of Hydropolitics

In *The Radical Novel in the United States, 1900-1954* (1956), Walter B. Rideout defines the American radical novel as “one which demonstrates, either explicitly or implicitly, that its author objects to the human suffering imposed by some socioeconomic system and *advocates that the system be fundamentally changed*” (12, emphasis in original). Not surprisingly, the genre of the radical novel that Rideout has in mind is the leftist, often Marxist, novel that flourished between the two world wars. In the Cold War context and beyond, scholars have pronounced the waning, if not death, of this genre. However, David Carlyle Aitchison has recently argued for the need to expand our conception of the radical novel and apply this more inclusive conception to American literature of the past several decades. Failing to do so may result in critics overlooking a significant amount of literature that critiques U.S. culture as fervently as did those classic protest novels of the interwar period: “In spite of the apparent vanishing of the radical novel in the USA following the mid-twentieth-century collapse of the American left, novels of social revolution continued, and still continue, to be written and written about” (Aitchison 2). As examples of this continuing genre, Aitchison cites “fictions speaking to the Black Power, Women’s Liberation, American Indian, and environmentalist movements. The Red Power and ‘ecotage’ subgenres, in particular, have proven especially robust” (2).¹¹⁵ Building upon

¹¹⁵ For a genealogy of the Red Power literary genre, see Sean Kicummah Teuton’s *Red Land, Red Power: Grounding Knowledge in the American Indian Novel* (2008).

Aitchison's work, this coda will examine environmentally oriented works that intersect with the tradition of "subaltern environmentalism" (O'Meara 67-68), a critical intervention that seeks to address the connections between environmental and cultural (neo)colonialisms based on race, class, and gender. The radical works that I discuss provide ideology in the form of narrative, as Fredric Jameson explicated in *The Political Unconscious* (1982); however, these novels demonstrate that this function of narrative "is true for resistant ideologies as well as hegemonic ones" (Reed 35).

Such resistant ideologies, in the environmentalist tradition, can contribute to what T. V. Reed calls "decolonial environmental justice cultural studies"—providing "a much-needed body of work at the intersection of post- or decolonial theory and practice and transnational movements for environmental justice" (25). Reed suggests that the field of ecocriticism can contribute to global environmental justice initiatives "by revealing the cultural rhetorics and representational processes that either support or resist efforts to understand and act on connections among race, class, gender, colonialism, and the other-than-human world" (39). The exploitation of colonized populations has generally occurred alongside the colonization of landscapes. Thus, environmental issues are always imbricated in cultural and political issues, and vice versa: "In the context of these global movements for justice, the lines between environmental movements and other movements have grown increasingly and appropriately blurred" (Reed 26). As a result, solutions to ecological crises inevitably require addressing political and ideological concerns as well as environmental ones.

Hydropolitical struggles tend to occur along traditional lines of power, in the sense that white, male, Anglo-European hegemonies tend to carry out hydrological and geopolitical projects whose negative ramifications—including displacement and exposure to harmful

pollutants—disproportionately affect vulnerable populations. Globally, more than 80 million people have been displaced by damming projects. According to the World Commission on Dams, those who are displaced are generally outside the hegemony of their given culture and, consequently, they are often not recognized, much less consulted, in the creation or aftermath of these flood projects: “Indigenous and tribal peoples and vulnerable ethnic minorities have suffered disproportionate levels of displacement and negative impacts on livelihood, culture and spiritual existence” (17). Daniel Klingensmith similarly asserts, “Dispossession and rehabilitation occur in the context of social relationships of power...” (12).¹¹⁶ From the late twentieth century to the present, global water management policies have had the most detrimental effects on subaltern communities consisting of women, the lower classes, and people of color (O’Meara 63-64). Attentive to the increasing need for environmental justice movements to consider the gender, class, and race-based discrimination that all-too-often accompany acts of environmental colonialism, I will turn in this coda to several contemporary hydropolitical works that account for subaltern communities, both on the national and global stage, in a more substantive manner than the previous works that I have examined.

The Hydropolitics of Power in *Chinatown* and *Almanac of the Dead*

Like so many works that I have analyzed throughout this dissertation, Roman Polanski’s 1974 neo-noir film *Chinatown* is obsessed with water. *Chinatown* is set in Los Angeles in 1937,

¹¹⁶ Turpin also provides several instances of how projects in the U.S. have negatively impacted marginalized groups. For example, during the late 1940s, the creation of the Garrison Dam in North Dakota displaced thousands of Native Americans of the Three Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara) who had lived and farmed in the area for thousands of years. The Army Corps of Engineers carefully constructed the dam so that it would not flood any of the “white” towns in the area; instead, the Corps flooded the vast majority of the Three Tribes’ ancestral land. Turpin notes, “The Three Tribes’ way of life was almost completely destroyed by Garrison Dam: they had lived in the area for a thousand years (thus developing a sense of history the Corps could not comprehend) and lost 94 per cent of their agricultural lands. Farms were liquidated, unemployment reached 70 per cent, and the community life so essential to their culture was lost” (176-78).

which, given its focus on hydropolitics, may be an allusion to Pare Lorentz's *The River*—a film both released and widely disseminated in that year. Like *The River*, *Chinatown* analyzes humans' attempts to harness the forces of the natural world. Yet, while *The River* was essentially a propaganda film used by the Roosevelt administration to justify the work of the Tennessee Valley Authority in the American South, *Chinatown* provides a critique of U.S. water management policies, particularly in California, by depicting the unethical politics of power utilized to manipulate American ecosystems and alter the relationship between human communities and the natural world. In doing so, *Chinatown* also reveals that such relationships are configured in gendered terms and with gendered biases. An ecofeminist reading of the film opens new critical avenues of inquiry into the ways in which environmental exploitation often transpires concurrently with other forms of exploitation based on chauvinistic and heteronormative conceptions of power and privilege.

Chinatown follows private investigator Jake Gittes, played by Jack Nicholson. Gittes is hired to investigate an adultery case and, in the process, uncovers a massive scheme involving the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power to unlawfully divert water away from the city in order to irrigate the Owens Valley north of Los Angeles. In one of the opening scenes of the film, a public hearing takes place to debate the creation of the Alto Vallejo Dam and a resulting large reservoir. Proponents of the reservoir claim that the damming project is necessary for the future of the water-scarce communities of the Los Angeles area; for example, one man at the hearing says, "Los Angeles is a desert community. Beneath this building and beneath our streets is a desert. And without water the dust will rise up and cover us as though we never existed. Now the Alto Vallejo can save us from this..." Opponents of the reservoir are principally farmers who claim that the Department of Water and Power is stealing water from the valley and

thus systematically destroying agriculture in the region. The Chief Engineer for the Department, Hollis Mulwray, also opposes the dam, stating that in a similar case involving the Vanderlip Dam, the shale beneath the structure failed to support the weight of the water, which resulted in the dam breaking and killing hundreds of people downriver. Mulwray's former partner at the Department of Water and Power, Noah Cross, is the mastermind behind the Alto Vallejo reservoir scheme. Cross and several partners have purchased real estate in the valley that was previously worthless due to its lack of irrigation, hoping that the reservoir will enable them to create a "50,000 acre empire" which will then be incorporated into the city of Los Angeles. Cross explains that "either you bring the water to LA, or you bring LA to the water," and he seeks to accomplish this "By incorporating the valley into the city. Simple as that." Cross's plan is to irrigate and develop this reclaimed "empire," and he stresses the importance of water not just because of its commercial necessity; echoing his former partner, Mulwray, he also asserts the psychological appeal that water has for people attempting to settle in the desert: "That's where life begins—sloughs, tide pools." Thus, Cross surmises that Mulwray's ability to provide water to Los Angeles was fundamental in creating a space fit for human habitation: "He made this city!" When investigator Gittes questions Cross about why he is so adamant about creating the Alto Vallejo Dam, he says that he is buying "the future," and in the deserts outside of Los Angeles, the most valuable commodity for the future is water.

In *Chinatown*, the characters of Mulwray and Cross are both loosely based on William Mulholland, who oversaw many contentious dam projects while working for the Department of Water and Power during the 1910s and 1920s. Some critics have faulted Mulholland for the breaking of the St. Francis Dam in 1928, a disaster that killed more than 400 people living in the valley north of Los Angeles (Turpin 140). During formal investigations, Mulholland argued that

the dam did not break but rather was blown up by the inhabitants of the Owens Valley, who feared further dispossession and who believed that the “metropolitan interests [of Los Angeles] illegally and immorally appropriated the Owens Valley for their own expansionary purposes” (Turpin 158). However, despite these accusations, Mulholland later refused to build a similar dam because he feared another disaster. In the film, writer Robert Towne converts Mulholland into two characters, Mulwray and Cross, in order to suggest the conflict Mulholland may have felt regarding the hydropolitics of the era. Mulwray takes the moral high ground in opposing a dam that is potentially dangerous, while Cross, driven by greed, supports the dam. Although it may be a stretch to suggest that *Chinatown* presents a clear environmentalist message, one could argue that Towne and Polanski present, at the very least, an implied environmental message. The film clearly indicts the destruction of the natural and social communities of the wild and rural spaces outside L.A. in order to feed the city center and the rapacious desires of a few privileged men.

In addition to addressing environmental exploitation, *Chinatown* explores gender dynamics, and it depicts highly problematic representations of sexuality. Polanski had previously treated similar themes in *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) as well as in virtually all of his subsequent films, and he likely chose the neo-noir genre to explore gender and sexuality in *Chinatown*. Noir films can be read as important indexes of the cultural unrest and moral relativism of the periods immediately preceding and following the Second World War: “With the Great Depression, Prohibition, and urban crowding and unrest, the crime film of the 1930s acted out social instabilities... In the 1970s, after the government corruption of Watergate, the moral ambiguities of the Vietnam War, and the confused sexual legacy of the 1960s, the genre returned with a new relevancy” (Corrigan and White 358-59). The classic noir genre emerged in the crime dramas

and detective films of the 1940s and 1950s—for example, *The Maltese Falcon* (1941), *Double Indemnity* (1944), *The Big Sleep* (1946), and *Touch of Evil* (1958). In such films, female characters are often depicted as *femme fatales*, who tend to be objectified sexually by male characters and indeed by the filmmakers themselves, who all-too-often reinforce the subjugated position of women by privileging the “possessive male gaze” both through cinematography and *mise-en-scène* (Corrigan and White 492). While *femme fatales* often possess a sense of agency and empowerment, their ability to undermine patriarchal power structures is generally limited as they tend to be seen as hindrances to the aims of the male characters who are constantly manipulated by them and, consequently, led astray from their quests (Corrigan and White 358-59). The question for *Chinatown* is to what extent does it adhere to or subvert the conventions of film noir, particularly its tendency to objectify female characters and, in most cases, blame them for the corruption of the world in which the male hero-characters find themselves.

In the very first scene of *Chinatown*, a man name Curly comes to Gittes’s office, and Gittes reveals to him that his wife has been having an affair. As the two men look through sexually explicit pictures of his wife, Curly says, “She’s no good.” This scene sets up the audience’s expectations for the traditional sexist representation of women in noir films as being both morally repulsive and sexually alluring to men. This theme is continued throughout much of the film; for example, in the scene in which Gittes meets Cross’s daughter and Mulwray’s wife, Evelyn, she interrupts him telling a sexist joke about an unfaithful wife. From this scene forward, Evelyn herself seems to adhere to the traditional characterization of the *femme fatale*, and it is not until the film’s conclusion that Towne and Polanski attempt to disrupt this stereotype. While Evelyn is in some ways similar to the classic *femme fatale* characters of noir cinema, in Polanski’s neo-noir it is ultimately her father who proves to be morally bankrupt and duplicitous.

Moreover, Polanski and Towne shape the narratology of the film, which is highly focalized through Gittes's perception of the world, so that we empathize with Evelyn and loathe the actions of her father, Noah Cross.

If *Chinatown* is to be read as a confluence of exploitative desires for both women and natural resources, then Cross is undoubtedly the most culpable character, as he habitually violates both the natural world and the women around him. In the most egregious instance of the latter, Cross rapes his daughter, Evelyn, and after they have a daughter together, he seems intent on also raping her. Throughout the film, Towne and Polanski draw a direct correlation between the violation of women's bodies and the violation of a landscape that is often feminized. John Walton, in *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California* (1992), argues that Cross's rape of Evelyn serves as a metaphor for the "rape" of the Owens Valley. In drawing this parallel, Towne and Polanski cultivate a far more traditional ecofeminist logic than that which I discussed in Chapter III relative to the works by John Cheever and James Dickey. As I mentioned in that chapter, ecofeminist scholars often highlight the "two-pronged rape and domination of the earth and the women who live in it" (Murphy 87). In seminal works such as *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor As Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (1975) and "Unearthing Herstory" (1996), Annette Kolodny has sought to highlight and problematize what she calls "America's oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine—that is, not simply the land as mother, but the land as woman, the total female principle of gratification..." ("Unearthing" 171). Kolodny further explains that as early Americans began to alter the natural world, many felt that they were destroying or even "raping" the "land-as-woman" (174, 176). Despite the conflict over damaging lands that had previously appeared both

feminine and “virgin,” Kolodny suggests that “gendering the land as feminine” ultimately assisted in the process of environmental colonialism: “In a sense, to make the new continent Woman was already to civilize it a bit, casting the stamp of human relations upon what was otherwise unknown and untamed” (175-76). This human stamp was specifically gendered feminine, as it enabled the patriarchy to perpetuate a system of power that simultaneously oppressed women and the gendered natural world. Donna Haraway notes that dualisms—such as self/other, culture/nature, and male/female—“have been persistent in Western traditions; they have all been systemic to the logics and practices of domination of women, people of color, nature, workers, animals—in short, domination of all constituted as others, whose task is to mirror the self” (35). Likewise, Catriona Sandilands contends that “Nature was defined in terms of stereotypical femininity because contemporary culture was the manifestation of all that is quintessentially male” (68).

Chinatown suggests that a lack of respect for one’s environment not only reflects but may also catalyze a lack of respect for humanity.¹¹⁷ In the field of contemporary ecofeminism, environmental ethicists and philosophers are increasingly exploring the ways in which patriarchal power structures lead to environmentally damaging patterns of human behavior. Ecofeminists posit that disrespect for nonhuman forms of life leads to disrespect for human life; in other words, exploitation of natural resources can engender the exploitation of humans, and

¹¹⁷ While *Chinatown* is principally concerned with drawing a parallel between the exploitation of women and the natural world, the film does not explore the ways in which water management policies impact women and men differently. Building upon the work of the World Commission on Dams, Patrick McCully notes that “while dams can have positive impacts on the lives of women, especially those living in areas which gain access to project services such as electricity or water, the ‘general impoverishment of communities and the social disruption, trauma and health impacts resulting from displacement have typically had more severe impacts on women’” (xxx).

vice versa.¹¹⁸ As problematic as the representations of sexuality are in *Chinatown*, the film parallels the subjugation of women and the environment, and in doing so, it usefully critiques patriarchal cultures by drawing attention to gendered dynamics of hegemonic power.

Like *Chinatown*, *Almanac of the Dead*, by Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Marmon Silko, draws a direct parallel between the violation of the environment and the violation of women, both physically and psychologically. Throughout the novel, it is primarily the female characters—most obviously Seese—who bear the most detrimental burdens of Anglo-European civilization and capitalism. However, unlike *Chinatown*, it is the female characters in *Almanac of the Dead*, such as Zeta and Lecha, who possess environmental sensitivities and, as a result, a feeling of ecological responsibility. *Almanac of the Dead* also diverges from *Chinatown* in that, in addition to women and the environment, the novel draws a parallel between indigenous peoples and the environment. Thus, according to Reed, *Almanac of the Dead* “offers a brilliantly nuanced analysis of the ways racism, colorism, sexism, class hierarchies, and nation-state rivalries have enabled and sustained the expropriation of tribal land and labor” (33-34). Lawrence Buell argues that Silko is a key writer in what he calls “ecological ethnopoetics,” in that she is committed “to imagining a less technologized, less ‘artificial’ life that extends across lines of gender and ethnicity” (*The Environmental* 20). Buell indicates that this trend began in Silko’s novel *Ceremony* (1977): “Although seemingly about people rather than about the environment as such, its vision of human affairs is governed by a sense of their reciprocity with the land” (286). However, Buell contends that *Ceremony* “is almost too idyllic,” and, therefore, *Almanac of the Dead* serves as a corrective to *Ceremony* in that it is wholly stripped of

¹¹⁸ This line of reasoning is also sometimes referred to as social ecology, which Timothy Clark defines as “arguments that human violence against the natural world is ultimately a product of oppressive structures of hierarchy among human beings” (89).

romanticism and instead portrays a dystopian vision of the U.S. as its most subjugated citizens struggle for social and environmental justice (290).

Much of *Almanac of the Dead* takes place in Tucson, Arizona, during the 1980s, although Silko's vision is so expansive that the novel encompasses great swaths of the histories of North, Central, and South America, particularly the colonization of those places. Focusing the novel on the turbulent politics of the 1980s affords Silko a way to demonstrate how indigenous populations have been subjugated from the first contact with Europeans in North America through the present. The plot of the novel revolves, in part, around Zeta, a prominent drugs and arms smuggler, and her sister Lecha, a psychic specializing in the location of dead bodies. The sisters reunite after many years because Lecha believes that the moment has arrived for them to translate their grandmother Zoeme's notebooks, which comprise *The Almanac of the Dead*.¹¹⁹ Zoeme predicts a shift in global politics in which indigenous populations from all over the world will rise up and seize control from Anglo-European colonialists. Extending from the initial settlement of North America to the cultural and environmental colonization taking place in the American West at the end of the twentieth century, Silko's novel exhibits how colonization, both past and present, geographically follows locations with the best water. In fact, the word "Tucson" means "Plentiful fresh water" in Papago (190), and one Native character in the novel named Calabazas explains, "The whites came into these territories. Arizona. New Mexico... They went around looking at all the best land and where the good water was... [The indigenous people] couldn't conceive of any way they could lose land their people had always held. They couldn't believe it. Some of them never did. Even after it was all over, and all the land and water were lost" (213). In the contemporary context, Silko's hydrocentric depiction of colonialism

¹¹⁹ The almanac is based, at least in part, on the *Popol Vuh*—a book of early history and mythology written by members of the Quiché-Maya nobility who lived in what is now Guatemala.

indicates repeatedly that neo-colonial initiatives in the American West are still focused on hydropolitics. For example, in the novel, a real estate developer named Leah attempts to create a resort and golf course in the desert which she calls Venice, Arizona. According to Leah, “Tucson had enough desert... People wanted to have water around them in the desert. People felt more confident and carefree when they could see water spewing out around them” (374). While water scarcity in the desert poses a seemingly insurmountable obstacle to land developers, Leah asserts, “Tell me they are using up all the water and I say: Don’t worry. Because science will solve the water problem in the West. New technology. They’ll *have to*” (374). Regarding the environment, Leah’s perspective remains flippant throughout the novel, and she solely considers short-term profit rather than ecological sustainability: “Market research had repeatedly found new arrivals in the desert were reassured by the splash of water. They are in the real estate business to make profits, not to save wildlife or save the desert. It was too late for the desert around Tucson anyway” (375).

Ultimately, Leah bribes a judge named Arne in order to drill deep-water wells in Tucson for her planned resort and golf course (376).¹²⁰ Judge Arne is a clear allusion to and critique of Arne Naess, the founding philosopher of deep ecology. Silko’s examination of deep ecology extends throughout the novel, and several characters suggest that “so-called ‘deep ecologists’... blamed earth’s pollution not on industrial wastes—hydrocarbons and radiation—but on overpopulation... ‘Too many people’ meant ‘too many *brown-skinned people*’” (415). One character named Clinton reads deep ecology as a sort of last-ditch effort for upper-class people of European descent to use environmental rhetoric to justify neo-colonialism: “The Europeans

¹²⁰ Arne’s estimation of environmental sustainability is as short-sighted as Leah’s: “He had seen the evidence, the exhibits by hydrologists, in the water rights lawsuit. Arne didn’t care; he would probably not live to see it: Tucson and Phoenix abandoned by the hundreds of thousands after all the groundwater had be consumed” (651).

had managed to dirty up the good land and good water around the world in less than five hundred years. Now the despoilers wanted the last bits of living earth for themselves alone” (415). In an analysis of this passage, Bridget O’Meara asserts, “An environmental movement that does not consistently and consciously foreground the relationship between the degradation of ecosystems and the violence against labor within gendered, racialized, and sexualized discourses and practices of capitalism merely serves and strengthens capital’s interests in (neo)colonial and (neo)imperial projects” (71). Such a suspicion of supposed environmentalists is particularly valuable if, as Silko suggests, cultural and environmental exploitation is justified by appropriating what were once resistance rhetorics and platforms.

Despite Silko’s critique of deep ecology, however, the novel suggests that Native communities often possess a sense of deep ecological connectedness with the natural world, and that this sense of connectedness is precisely what Anglo-European colonialists have lacked since coming to North America: “such a longing for the distant past was a symptom of what had come of the Europeans who had left their home continent to settle in strange lands...[I]t took two or three thousand years before migrant humans were once again comfortable on a continent” (689). Additionally, Reed notes that *Almanac of the Dead* is very similar to the manifesto that was created by the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991, a group that sought to demonstrate the inextricable connections between economic, environmental, and civil rights issues.¹²¹ This manifesto is generally regarded as the foundational text for the contemporary environmental justice movement: “*Almanac* ties all these threads [from the manifesto] together in a critique of toxicity, militarism, and economic exploitation; like the manifesto, it calls for recognition of species interdependence, cultural independence, and the

¹²¹ Similarly, the Indigenous Environmental Network is “A network of Indigenous Peoples empowering Indigenous Nations and communities towards sustainable livelihoods, demanding environmental justice and maintaining the Sacred Fire of [their] traditions” (qtd. in Clark 87).

self-determination of peoples modeled on indigenous communities rooted in intimate relation with the land” (Reed 29). However, in exploring Native communities’ relationships to the land, ecocritical scholars must remain suspicious of artistic productions, such as James Cameron’s recent film *Avatar* (2009), that portray indigenous populations as somehow closer to the natural world. In *Almanac of the Dead*, Silko does not depict Native Americans as, in the words of Reed, “superecologists”: “Neither romanticizing Indians as superecologists nor calling for a retreat to preindustrial technologies is a substitute for the hard work of protecting or restoring the sovereignty of Native communities around the globe and reanimating indigenous lands ravaged by uranium extraction, toxic dumping, and military explosions” (38). Above all, Silko’s novel highlights and critiques Western globalization as a neo-colonial force, the greatest consequences of which are borne by less powerful indigenous populations. These consequences are economic but they are also cultural given the connections— which we could call deep ecological—such populations often have to particular places. Silko writes, “Mexicans and Indians grew connected to a place; they would not leave Tucson even after all of Arizona’s groundwater was polluted or pumped dry” (651).

As a result of these deep connections to place, Reed argues that Native populations across the globe are concerned with “‘returning’ or ‘restoring’ all Native lands”—a process that he contends will include three steps: “First, returning ‘home’ lands to particular tribes; second, restoring a sense of sacredness to the land and/or communal ownership, rooted in indigenous traditions; and third, most expansively, restoring a sustainable Earth in the wake of devastating colonization via resource extraction, severance of people from place, and capitalist industrialization” (28-29). *Almanac of the Dead* suggests that decolonization will inevitably occur in North America but only when all of the continent’s resources have been consumed, and

the indigenous characters repeatedly suggest that water is the most important resource in the West: "...someday the United States would spend all its money and sell off and strip everything they could take from the land. Finally, the United States would be poor broke, and all the water would be gone; then the people would see European descendants scurrying back across the ocean back to the lands of their forefathers" (523). In a similar passage, Silko writes, "The tribal people had tried to warn the Europeans about the earth's outrage if humans continued to blast open their mother. But now all the warnings were too late... all the southwestern states will run out of drinking water" (618-19).

However, throughout the novel, Native communities refuse to accept the idea that decolonization will occur only when the resources are used up and the Earth utterly ravaged. Instead, the Native characters contend that they possess a sense of connectedness with place that engenders a more sustainable existence both for the human and nonhuman world. For centuries, this philosophy garnered condescension from colonialists; yet as ecological disasters occur with more and more frequency in the American West, the indigenous peoples of the novel feel increasingly vindicated in the knowledge that their way of life was and possibly still is a better model for human interaction with the natural world. For example, Silko writes, "All over the world Europeans had laughed at indigenous people for worshipping the rain clouds, the mountains, and the trees. But now...the white people stop laughing as all the trees were cut and all the animals killed, and all the water dirtied or used up" (628). To halt the exploitation of Native lands in the West, Silko's characters engage in radical forms of protest, and in doing so, they parallel the actions of Edward Abbey and his eco-raiders.

Silko likely had Abbey in mind while writing *Almanac of the Dead*; in one passage, she alludes to Abbey directly by saying that her characters will "throw a *monkey wrench* into the

computer networks of business associates, competitors, or enemies” (687, emphasis added). Other characters allude to the works of ecosabotage perpetrated by “Earth Avenger and Eco-Coyote” (689), the latter of which is likely an allusion to Abbey, who is often referred to by his followers as “Coyote”—an illusion to the coyote-trickster narratives in Native American mythology.¹²² However, one significant way in which Silko diverges from Abbey is that in her novel, ecosaboteurs band together with Native peoples to fight capitalist land developers and other forms of environmental colonialism.¹²³ Another significant change following Abbey’s work is Silko’s depiction of large-scale acts of ecosabotage. While Abbey and his characters fantasize about such acts, they generally carry them out less frequently. Silko, however, depicts “eco-kamikazes” who sacrifice their lives in the violent battle for environmental and social justice. These characters justify their illegal actions because to uphold U.S. laws “would be to participate in and reinforce the social and ecological violence that has sustained these systems for five hundred years” (O’Meara 68-69). As in Abbey’s *Desert Solitaire*, *The Monkey Wrench Gang*, and *Hayduke Lives!*, the principal target for all the ecosaboteurs is the Glen Canyon Dam, which, according to O’Meara, they see as the “icon of capitalism’s triumph over nature” (70). Consequently, Silko’s characters assert, “Break open the dams and the electric motors of the machinery, machinery that belongs to the masters, stutter to a halt” (162). Yet, unlike Abbey, Silko has her characters carry out these proposed acts of ecosabotage. In the conclusion of the novel, “Human bombs had been sent to great hydroelectrical dams and electrical generation

¹²² See, for example, Peter Quigley’s *Coyote in the Maze: Tracking Edward Abbey in a World of Words* (1998).

¹²³ Reed argues that “In the narrative Silko claims was in part dictated to her by ‘the ancestors,’ networks of resistance to colonialist capitalism are symbolized by the intersecting forces of the Army of the Homeless, a rag-tag group of lucidly crazy Vietnam vets of various races fighting gentrification of their Tucson neighborhood, and the Army of Justice and Redistribution, an indigenous-led band of insurrectionists emerging from the Chiapas region of Mexico (several years before the ‘real-life’ Zapatistas came into existence” (27).

plants across the United States. The human bombs would leap at the most strategic points of the dam's structure. All the interstate power transmission lines had been scheduled to go down simultaneously after the dams had been destroyed" (689-90). After these plans have been completed, federal authorities blame the collapse of the Glen Canyon Dam on "structural failure"; to refute this governmental cover-up, the co-conspiring groups of indigenous people and "eco-warriors" showcase video footage of their members deliberately blowing up the dam, which inspires a global revolution (727). Therefore, within Silko's vision, hydropolitics are a core concern, and it is an act of water-related ecosabotage that leads to the creation of a new world order at the heart of which are interconnected issues of social and environmental justice.

The Globalization of Hydropolitics

Radical reactions to dams have spread across the globe, as countries like India and China have self-consciously adopted the TVA and other American water management policies as their models. Klingensmith contends that the "TVA was widely regarded as a paradigm for 'world reconstruction,' a model agency which showed how the liberal state could meet or avert the political and social challenges of economic crisis, revolution, and war" (6). Patrick McCully makes a similar argument, asserting, "Although it has built dams in only one river basin, the Tennessee Valley Authority may have had the most influence worldwide of any of the US dam-building bureaucracies" (17).¹²⁴ Furthermore, in countries like China and India, the TVA model "promised to demonstrate that the basis for a modernity which had evolved painfully in the West

¹²⁴ McCully also states, "The TVA's international influence was immense. Thousands of foreign planners, engineers and politicians visited the Tennessee Valley at the expense of the US government and returned home to spread the gospel" of the TVA's success (245). In 1967, Albert Hirschman wrote, "For a number of years after World War II, any river valley development scheme, whether it concerned the Sao Francisco River in Brazil, the Papaloapan River in Mexico, the Cauca in Columbia, the Dez in Iran, or the Damodar in eastern India, was presented to a reassured public as a true copy...of the Tennessee Valley Authority" (qtd. in McCully 245).

could be reproduced in a matter of decades in the decolonizing world” (6-7).¹²⁵ In *Rivers by Design: State Power and the Origins of U.S. Flood Control* (2006), Karen M. O’Neill demonstrates the necessity of confronting the hydrological issues that will increasingly affect water supplies across the globe; and she argues that studying hydropolitics in the context of the U.S. is now more important than ever:

With the United Nations estimating that two to seven billion people will lack ready access to fresh water by 2050, there is growing interest in understanding the institutions that manage our water. About 60 percent of the world’s largest rivers have been altered by hydraulic structures—including flood control works—that limit our flexibility in planning for future ecosystem and human needs. Because water projects in the United States have inspired many of these structures, studying the social elements of water engineering in the United States may yield lessons about the prospects for achieving economic and political development goals elsewhere. (xii)

Thus, studying the literary and cinematic responses to the damming of the American South and West can enable scholars to better understand contemporary transnational responses to the globalization of American hydropolitics.

As U.S. water management models have been exported to the developing or decolonizing world, they have been and continue to be recreated in these countries on a massive scale. For example, India and China have become the world’s leaders both in terms of building dams but also displacing people to facilitate these dams. Since the Communist Revolution in 1949, China has transitioned from having 22 large dams to now having more than 22,000 (Khatun 7). The

¹²⁵ Similarly, O’Neill states, “Engineering projects and legal agreements have remade nearly every river in the United States and have shaped expectations around the world about how governments should control the environment” (xi).

government of China reports that they have displaced 10.2 million people as a result of damming initiatives and the creation of large reservoirs (McCully xxxi, lviii). The number of displaced people is probably far larger than this, and many scholars speculate that the Chinese government manipulates the figures in order to appear as if they have displaced fewer people (Khatun 7). The largest dam in China is the Three Gorges Dam on the Yangtze River, which alone has displaced nearly one and a half million citizens (11). The Three Gorges Dam is generally seen as an environmental catastrophe because it harms local ecosystems and exacerbates the possibility of deadly earthquakes, mudslides, and water contamination. The dam has also destroyed an estimated 1,300 archaeological sites, including many shrines and temples that are held sacred by the local populations (11). The degradation of the ecosystems, alongside the complete annihilation of many culturally and religiously significant places, has caused extreme controversy in China. However, compared to the hydropolitical battles waged in the U.S., there have been far fewer political protests in China, which is not a measure of social compliance but rather a result of the restrictive political policies in place there. Under the current regime, Chinese citizens have not been allowed to mobilize mass social resistance, particularly after the Tiananmen Square protest in 1989. Perhaps the single most important protest to the Three Gorges Dam came from Chinese journalist Dai Qing, whose book *Yangtze! Yangtze!* (1989) provides a scathing critique of the dam both for its social and environmental effects. The Chinese government has banned the book, and because of her arguments against the Three Gorges Dam as well as her involvement in the Tiananmen Square protest, Qing was imprisoned for ten months (Khatun 12).

Large-scale dams in India have likely displaced far more than those in China. Since gaining independence from Britain in 1947, India has built 3,300 large-scale dams, placing it

third in the world for dam-building nations (Roy ix). As in the U.S., the 3,300 dams in India were constructed in the name of national development. Yet, one fifth of India's population (200 million people) still lack access to safe drinking water; two thirds lack access to basic sanitation (600 million people); and floods have increased, rather than decreased, since 1947. Damming in India has displaced 50 million people or more, and to put that in perspective, we should remember that the TVA only displaced approximately 125,000 (Klingensmith 37-9). The Sardar Sarovar Dam, proponents proclaim, "is the largest, most ambitious river valley development project ever conceived in human history" (Roy ix).

Compared to the authoritarian political control held by the Communist Party in China, the "multi-party functional democratic political structure of India allows its citizens to enjoy systematic free elections, uncensored media, free speech and freedom of judiciary" (Khatun 14). As a result, protests in India over the Sardar Sarovar Dam have been much more robust, and the Indian government has, at least at times, responded to the objections of its citizens. For example, using nonviolent, Gandhian protest tactics, the Narmada Bachao Andolan (NBA), a group of activists in India, declared in 1993 that they would rather drown themselves in the flood waters of the reservoir than be displaced (Roy 47, McCully Iv). Although the Sardar Sarovar has now been built, the NBA's efforts were successful in some ways. In particular, the protests eventually led the World Bank to withdraw all funding from the damming project. After an independent review, the World Bank refused to condone the project due to the fact that "environmental and social issues received so little attention from the Indian government" (qtd. in Khatun 9).

Perhaps even more effective than the NBA's protest of the Sardar Sarovar Dam was the critique articulated in Arundhati Roy's *The Cost of Living* (1999). For Roy, "The story of the Narmada valley is nothing less than the story of Modern India" (x). As I have demonstrated

relative to water management policies in the U.S., Roy notes that “Dam-building grew to be equated with nation-building” (13). However, the perception of large-scale dams in India has altered over the past few decades, and this too is similar to the reversal of American perceptions of dams: “Big Dams started well, but have ended badly. There was a time when everybody loved them, everybody had them—the Communists, Capitalists, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists. There was a time when Big Dams moved men to poetry. Not any longer. All over the world there is a movement growing against Big Dams” (14). Roy argues that the “Local Pain for National Gain” is an unsubstantiated “myth,” and instead dams are “a government’s way of accumulating authority (deciding who will get how much water and who will grow what where” (14-15). Furthermore, Roy explains that the dams in India are ecologically damaging: “They cause floods, waterlogging, salinity; they spread disease. There is mounting evidence that links Big Dams to earthquakes” (14). These dams will also destroy more than 4,000 square kilometers of deciduous forests, which are vitally important for the production of much-needed clean air (28). Altering the supplies of water as well as the perennial supplies of nutrient-rich soil from floods also irreversibly changes the subsistence agricultural lifestyle of indigenous peoples: “People stop growing things that they can afford to *eat*, and start growing things they can only afford to *sell*. By linking themselves to the ‘market’ they lose control over their own lives” (68).

Roy contends that due to these negative social and environmental impacts, the developed world has abandoned the rage for damming and instead has “exported [it] to the Third World in the name of Development Aid, along with their other waste, like old weapons, superannuated aircraft carriers, and banned pesticides” (15). In other words, “Aid is just another praetorian business enterprise. Like colonialism was” (15). Thus, for Roy, as we have seen in Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, the fight against dams is part of a broader war for decolonial or

postcolonial environmental and social justice. She writes, “The millions of displaced in India are nothing but refugees of an unacknowledged war. And we, like the citizens of White America and French Canada and Hitler’s Germany, are condoning it by looking away... We have to fight specific wars in specific ways and we have to fight to win. Listen then to the story of the Narmada Valley. Understand it. And, if you wish, enlist” (21-23). In this passage, Roy draws a parallel between India’s damming projects and historic acts of slavery and genocide, and she marshals militant language: she is fighting a *war* and she wants others to *enlist*. Roy also makes it clear that this war has transnational ramifications:

The war for the Narmada valley is not just some exotic tribal war, or a remote rural war or even an exclusively Indian war. It’s a war for the rivers and the mountains and the forests of the world. All sorts of warriors from all over the world, anyone who wishes to enlist, will be honored and welcomed. Every kind of warrior will be needed. Doctors, lawyers, teachers, judges, journalists, students, sportsmen, painters, actors, singers, lovers... The borders are open, folks! Come on in. (Roy 43)

Like many Cold War American writers, Roy links dam building to the development of nuclear technologies, as both have grave social and environmental ramifications, and both detract from humans’ relationship with the natural world:

Big Dams are to a nation’s ‘development’ what nuclear bombs are to its military arsenal. They’re both weapons of mass destruction. They’re both weapons governments use to control their own people. Both twentieth-century emblems that mark a point in time when human intelligence has outstripped its own instinct for survival. They’re both malignant indications of a civilization

turning upon itself. They represent the severing of the link, not just the link—the *understanding*—between human beings and the planet they live on. They scramble the intelligence that connects eggs to hens, milk to cows, food to forests, water to rivers, air to life, and the earth to human existence.

Can we unscramble it?

Maybe. Inch by inch. Bomb by bomb. Dam by dam. Maybe by fighting specific wars in specific ways. We could begin in the Narmada valley. (80-81)

Roy concludes her examination of dams with a clear call to action: “When will you stop waiting? When will you say ‘That’s enough!’ and reach for your weapons, whatever they may be?” (79).

I predict that in the not-too-distant future, radical environmental activists in India and China will resist the damming of their nations’ rivers with increasing fervor and possibly even violence. We will also likely see more and more rhetoric that resembles Edward Abbey’s and Leslie Silko’s, and more and more radical protest tactics such as those we have seen from “ecoterrorist” groups like Earth Liberation Front in the past two decades. Understanding the global, rather than local or even national, ramifications of environmental issues is crucial for the future of environmental literature and film as protest genres, as well as for the environmental movement more broadly. Since the 1960s and 1970s, environmental anxieties have advanced from a national to a global scale, leading Lawrence Buell to declare that “If such a thing as global culture ever comes into being, environmentalism will surely be one of the catalysts” (*The Environmental* 3).¹²⁶ He argues that studying art can and should play a central role in creating this environmentally engaged world culture: “Although the creative and critical arts may seem

¹²⁶ In making this argument, Buell alludes to Al Gore, who contends that “we must make the rescue of the environment the central organizing principle for civilization” (qtd. in Buell 2).

remote from the arenas of scientific investigation and public policy, clearly they are exercising, however unconsciously, an influence upon the emerging culture of environmental concern, just as they have played a part in shaping as well as merely expressing every other aspect of human culture” (3). Environmental literature and film can simultaneously tell us a great deal about nature and human nature, and this new knowledge can engender innovative ways of seeing, experiencing, and protecting the nonhuman world. All of the writers and filmmakers that I have discussed throughout this dissertation believe that the degradation of the environment detracts from both the physiological and psychological health of humans across the globe. The water-haunted novels and films of the 1960s and 1970s highlight the ontological significance of environmental encounters and reveal a broad conception of networks that accounts for humans in relation to cultural and ecological systems that are more connected with the passing of each year.

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**EXTENDED LIST OF HYDROCENTRIC AND HYDROPOLITICAL TEXTS AND
FILMS**

Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849)

Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (1883)

John Muir, *The Yosemite* (1912)

Lyle Saxon, *Father Mississippi* (1927)

James Thurber, "The Day the Dam Broke," *The Thurber Carnival* (1933)

King Vidor (Director), *Our Daily Bread [Hell's Crossroads]* (1934)

Charles Nordhoff and James Norman Hall, *The Hurricane* (1935)

Pare Lorentz, *The Plow That Broke the Plains* (1936)

E.P. O'Donnell, *Green Margins* (1936)

John Ford (Director), *The Hurricane* (1937)

Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937)

Elia Kazan, *The People of the Cumberland* (1937)

Joseph Kane, *Under Western Stars* (1938)

Richard Wright, "The Man Who Saw the Flood" (1937), "Down by the Riverside" (1938)

William Faulkner, *The Wild Palms [If I Forget Thee, Jerusalem]* (1939)

John Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939)

Clarence Brown (Director), *The Rains Came* (1939)

Busby Berkeley (Director), *They Made Me A Criminal* (1939)

George Sherman, *Rovin' Tumbleweeds* (1939)

Louis Bromfield, *Wild is the River* (1941)

William Alexander Percy, *Lanterns on the Levee: Recollections of a Planter's Son* (1941)

Preston Sturges (Director), *Sullivan's Travels* (1941)

William Bradford Huie, *Mud on the Stars* (1942)

Howard Hawks, *Red River* (1948)

Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac* (1949)

Anthony Mann, *Border Incident* (1949)

Jean Renoir (Director), *The River* (1951)

William Faulkner, film script based on "Old Man" (1953)

William Faulkner, "Mississippi" (1954)

Wallace Stegner, *This Is Dinosaur: Echo Park Country and Its Magic Rivers* (1955)

Borden Deal, *Dunbar's Cove* (1957)

Renzo Merusi (Director), *The Dam on the Yellow River* (1960)

John Graves, *Goodbye to a River* (1960)

John Ford (Director), *The Man who Shot Liberty Valance* (1962)

Madison Jones, *A Buried Land* (1963)

Joan Didion, *Run, River* (1963)

Jack Pearl, *Dam of Death* (*The Invaders* series) (1967)

Frank Perry (Director), *The Swimmer* (1968)

Wallace Stegner, *The Sound of Mountain Water* (1969)

Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (1972)

Adrienne Rich, *Diving into the Wreck* (1973)

Terrence Malick (Director), *Badlands* (1973)

Mark Robson (Director), *Earthquake* (1974)

Annie Dilliard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (1974)

Ann Zwinger *Run, River, Run* (1975)

Norman Maclean, *A River Runs Through It* (1976)

Joan Didion, *The White Album* (1977)

Terrence Malick (Director), *Days of Heaven* (1978)

Barry Lopez, *River Notes: The Dance of the Herons* (1979)

Marilynne Robinson, *Housekeeping* (1980)

William Least Heat Moon, *Blue Highways* (1983)

Lee Smith, *Oral History* (1983)

Mark Rydell (Director), *The River* (1984)

Clint Eastwood, *Pale Rider* (1985)

Joy Harjo, "The Flood" (1990)

Tony Earley, *Here We Are in Paradise* (1994)

Andrea Barrett, *Ship Fever* (1996), *Servants of Map* (2002)

John Kent Harrison (Director), Horton Foote (Writer), *Old Man* (1997)

Ron Rash, *Among the Believers* (2000), *Raising the Dead* (2002), *One Foot in Eden* (2002)

Joel and Ethan Cohen (Directors), *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000)

Dot Jackson, *Refuge* (2006)

Spike Lee (Director), *When the Levees Broke* (2006)

Gary Hansen, *Wet Desert* (2007)

Jesse Graves, *Field Portrait* (2008)

Francine Prose, *Goldengrove* (2008)

Tom Piazza, *City of Refuge* (2009)

Dave Eggers, *Zeitoun* (2009)

Natasha Trethewey, *Beyond Mississippi: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast* (2010)