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Infectious Agents: Race and Environment in Nineteenth-Century America

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LOYOLA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

INFECTIOUS AGENTS: RACE AND ENVIRONMENT IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICA

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
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BY
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation critically examines the relationship between race and nature in nineteenth-century America by analyzing texts that attempt to discover, create, or preserve a pure national identity. Historical events in the nineteenth-century U.S. – such as mass immigration, Native American displacement, industrialization, westward expansion, and the rise of science – frustrated the quest for a unified American identity. While these events seem various, each one exacerbated a nation already bewildered by one central question. What is the traffic between body and space? Nineteenth-century American literature frequently portrays the American environment as an ideal space in need of preservation and at risk of contamination. While racial oppression is often analyzed through the discrete parameters of the body, with skin color or blood indicating the mark of the “other,” my literary study concerning both race and environment reveals that bodies and places are not necessarily contained or stable entities. Rather, I argue that race and nature function as infectious agents, each evoking a figurative “diffusion” between body and environment in which space becomes racialized and race spatialized. This study combines analyses of literary texts by Herman Melville, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Willa Cather, non-fiction works by Margaret Fuller, Henry David Thoreau, and John Muir, as well as a scientific treatise by Ellen H. Richards to argue that nationalism inflects the American environmental imagination with a twofold
desire for racial and spatial purity, an ideology that pervades not only fiction, but non-fiction and science, spanning the long Nineteenth Century.
INTRODUCTION

INFECTIOUS AGENTS

When Hurricane Katrina wreaked havoc across the Gulf Coast in 2005, it resulted in the physical destruction of the coast and its people and revealed an ongoing cultural heritage that spatializes race and racializes space. The storm exposed a seemingly contained dirty secret, disclosing some of the most unappealing conditions of American life: racism and poverty. As Judith Jackson Fossett comments, “dual remnants of slavery emerged from Katrina’s toxic soup. The whole cloth of racial, socioeconomic, and color caste, as well as post-1945 geographic segregation…could be seen. It was juxtaposed with the idea of New Orleans as a condition of possibility for the good life that white elites (particularly men) might experience” (327). The confluence of African Americans and spaces marked as valueless, dirty, and morally degenerate precedes, coincides with, and follows in Katrina’s wake. Unfortunately, the American imaginary associates whiteness and a pure, clean environment while blackness and filth also seem yoked. This contemporary issue has deep historical roots.

This dissertation critically examines the relationship between race and environment in nineteenth-century America by analyzing texts that attempt to discover, create, or preserve a pure national identity by purifying, preserving, and inhabiting the physical environment. Historical events in the nineteenth-century U.S. – such as mass
immigration, Native American displacement, industrialization, westward expansion, and the rise of science – frustrated the quest for a unified American identity. While these events seem various, each one exacerbated a nation already bewildered by one central question: what is the traffic between body and space? In working out the answers to that question, nineteenth-century American literature frequently portrays the American environment as an ideal space in need of preservation and at risk of contamination.

While racial oppression is often analyzed through the discrete parameters of the body, with skin color or blood indicating the mark of the “other,” my literary study concerning both race and environment reveals that bodies and places are not necessarily contained or stable entities. Rather, race and nature function as infectious agents, each evoking a figurative “diffusion” between body and environment in which space becomes racialized and race spatialized. Nationalism inflects the American environmental imagination with a twofold desire for racial and spatial purity, an ideology that pervades not only fiction, but non-fiction and science, spanning the long nineteenth century.

Many nineteenth-century texts portray the environment as a “purification machine” or an ideal space in need of preservation and at risk of contamination.¹ We tend to think about systemic domination of empowered “whites” over other races in America as a matter of bodies: skin color or blood can be the mark of non-citizenship.

¹ This term comes from Bruce Braun’s “‘On the Raggedy Edge of Risk’: Articulations of Race and Nature After Biology.” In regards to the get back to nature campaigns of environmentalists like John Muir, he writes, “Nature, then served as a purification machine, a place where people became white, where the racial and hereditary habits of immigrants could be overcome. In short, the journey into nature was just as much a journey away from something else, and that something else was race” (197). Braun makes a brilliant contribution to the study of race and nature, but I don’t fully agree with this statement. The “purification machine” is definitely part of the American environmental imagination, but my study shows how race was not easily left behind, and nature was not simply a “purification machine,” for it was also a vulnerable entity.
However, a study concerning both race and environment can expose that it is not simply about bodies polluting other bodies; it is about bodies contaminating space, which can in turn infect everything else. This appears to be a sort of figurative “diffusion” between body and environment. Early environmental movements were more concerned with controlling a mythically pure American identity than anything else. Through the form of sanitary science, we tried to control this dangerous diffusion between marked bodies and American space.

Despite calls to diversify the field, race has not been a central figure in the study of literature and the environment. This lack of attention stems from the field’s focus on man-made industrial contamination as the source of our environmental crisis. By extending the environmental conversation to include race, however, I will show that in the nineteenth century, race was also considered a source of contamination, threatening the “purity” of Americans and American environments. The figurative spatialization of race contributes to our environmental imagination and the early formation of the environmental movement. All environmental debates require an assessment of value, and most of these assessments are based on an imagined purity. The nineteenth-century idea of race signified difference between persons and was based on a hierarchical system of value. If we apply this same definition to a spatialized concept of race, we can further deduce that places also signify difference and exist within a value system. The result of this spatialized construction of race is an environmental heritage of inequity. Not all parts of nature are valuable to the environmentalist, and perhaps we should reconsider why. Early environmentalism inherited this system and was at least in part a form of
border control, attempting to maintain American purity from contamination, in body and space. My interest in opening up the environmental conversation to include the mutual constructions of space and race is not to sully the early environmental movement, but to look at it critically. By examining some of these early motives, we might begin to understand this heritage that is deeply tied to our national identity, and only then can we begin to fix what is already well entrenched.

The role of nature in nineteenth-century texts is commonly described by literary critics as a one-dimensional myth, configuring the American landscape as the magical material used to construct a pure, unified, and exceptional American identity. While some literary representations of nature construct the nation in this way, many authors use representations of nature to disrupt national cohesion. Relegating nature to a myth of exceptionalism reduces the complexities of nature to a footnote in most critical debates. “Nature’s nation” has become a master narrative with inherent setbacks: it focuses on the relationship between nature imagery and the nation’s citizens, ignoring representations of the relationship between nature and non-citizens. In addition, this focus on the cultural relationship between nationalism and nature never seems to lead to discussions about the environment, as if the way we imagine nature has no relation to the way we treat it.

I use the term “infectious agents” to refer to the potentially “infectious” power of the other and the environment. I do not mean “agent” to suggest the human will to make

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2 This term comes from Perry Miller’s benchmark text *Nature’s Nation*: Miller argues that as a newly formed nation, America lacked an identity and authors like James Fennimore Cooper solved this problem by investing the landscape with national importance: “The vastness of the continent, its very emptiness, instead of meaning that we are blank and formless, makes us deeply interesting amid our solitudes” (Miller 11). Nineteenth-century citizens consist generally of “white” males, while non-citizens include women, slaves, Native-Americans, and immigrants.
and execute decisions. Obviously, granting nature “agency” would be problematic, since it anthropomorphizes nature; hence, I do not mean “agency” in the sense of subjects with volition. More generally, “agent” suggests an active movement and fluidity between boundaries, like the semi-permeable ones between body and space. By calling nature an agent, I hope to rescue it from the overly culturalist readings of nature in postmodernism, which render nature inert, as well as from the long standing literary tradition of turning environments into “setting,” a term that in itself renders nature passive, a mere backdrop to human endeavors. In the sciences, an agent refers to a kind of catalyst. For example, adding an oxidizing agent to another compound can cause a reaction and reconfigure that compound into something else. It is the combination of agent and other that causes a reaction. Although the agent does not have volition or human will, it is also not passive.

In attaching the term “agent” to contagion, I intend to invoke the discourse of disease that plays multiple roles throughout this project. Historically, this language reflects germ theory and the language of sanitarianism of the early twentieth century, which is particularly relevant to chapters three and four. Even prior to the popularization of germ theory, however, epidemics like cholera and yellow fever dispersed the language of contagion, making it historically relevant for the long nineteenth century. These epidemics provoked fear that reached well beyond the scope of the actual disease. Immigrants, in particular, were physical and figurative “agents” of these diseases.

This project, however, is not about epidemics. Susan Sontag warns that using disease discourse metaphorically can risk reinforcing an already potentially harmful language. Because this discourse is so powerful and carries such cultural influence,
however, these metaphors require further investigation. In response to Sontag, Cynthia Davis argues that such metaphors can function in different ways, and therefore the capacity to use this discourse should be left open (835-6). In this project, I will investigate fiction and non-fiction that engages the metaphors of disease because this discourse is a touchstone for seemingly disparate ideas, disciplines, and entities; it brings together the physical and the cultural in ways that are necessary to understand the traffic between bodies and space. I categorize these intersections into three main topics: discipline and theory, nature and culture, body and space.

I. Discipline and Theory

In this project, I explore the overlapping ideologies of nationalism, sanitarianism, and environmentalism. Working within a frame of American nationalism, I examine the ways in which nature and race participate and disrupt national identity. Therefore, while ecocriticism and cultural studies are sometimes considered antagonistic, they will both be practiced here, for their subjects are deeply intertwined. Ecocriticism marks a political agenda and subject of study more than a methodology, as Cheryll Glotfelty notes (xviii). Ecocritics aim to heal an “endangered world” marked by environmental destruction and tend to focus on non-fiction nature writing or contemporary fiction that speaks to this topic or agenda.³ In many ways, cultural studies is equally broad, focusing on the production of culture through fiction (and other mediums), often focusing on subjectivity over objectivity (During 1). Moving in opposite—yet equally extreme—directions,

³ I borrow this term from Lawrence Buell’s Writing for an Endangered World. Buell’s earlier work The Environmental Imagination was particularly interested in the analysis of non-fiction works as the focus of Ecocriticism.
ecocritics are often too focused on the real, while cultural studies critics are too focused on the subjective. Therefore, this study hybridizes these two approaches, which seems appropriate for a study of primary sources that continually break down the difference between nonfiction and fiction, the real and the imaginary.

In addition to this theoretical composite, this study is cross-disciplinary as it brings together literary studies, history, and science. While the intersections between history and literature have become commonplace in literary studies, the longstanding division between the sciences and the humanities generates a gap in our understanding of environment and environmentalism, as well as our understanding of American culture and American identity. Filling in this gap by putting these disciplines in conversation with one another is far from simple, but the discourse of disease helps to cross such boundaries.

II. Nature and Culture

This project is built on the idea that nature and culture continually collapse into one another. Even the ambiguity in the term “nature” displays a breakdown between nature and culture as distinct entities. According to Raymond Williams, the three dominant definitions of nature are the “character of something,” an “inherent force” found in entities that may or may not include human beings, and “the material world itself” with or without humans (Keywords 219). Hence, “nature” is a term deeply inflected with cultural connotations. While mostly based in the material world, it can

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include or exclude human beings and cultural values. Nature and culture have a
dialectical relationship: each continually refashions the other.

III. Body and Space

The most important reason for using metaphors of contagion here is because they
break down borders between bodies and environments, a figurative deconstruction of the
nature/culture dichotomy. While there is critical work on figures of contagion in
American literature and the relationship between contagion and nativism, there is not
nearly enough emphasis on the effects these metaphors have on the environmental
imagination. Priscilla Wald argues,

Specifically, the bacteriological work that made it possible to understand and
track disease transmission with greater accuracy and enabled the identification of
healthy human carriers in the first decade of the twentieth century shifted the
focus of attention from the environment to the medical diagnosis and treatment of
the individual in both England and the US. (655)

The twentieth-century texts in this project suggest otherwise; while they display the
influence of germ theory, they do not do so in a way that bypasses the idea of
environment as a vector. Rather than focus on a figurative infection traveling from body
to body, I will focus on transmissions rendered through the environment, for the
environmental imagination has also been encoded by this same discourse, a discourse
culturally inflected with nativism. Therefore, I am not interested in epidemics, but rather

5 This may be because the earlier nineteenth century ideas about miasma theory, which are based on
atmospheric contaminants, had not yielded to germ theory yet. The other possibility, as I discuss in chapter
three, is that while germs identified a tangible source of contamination, the microbe is invisible to the
naked eye; therefore, housewives could not see the source of contamination, and their preventative
measures targeted the environment, as well as the body.

6 One example of the confluence of place and epidemics appears in Margaret Humphreys “No Safe Place:
Disease and Panic in American History.” She writes, “While there are many factors in creating panic, I
believe the most essential is the relationship of each disease to its place. Yellow fever and cholera convert
the figurative portal between body and environment that is produced and reflected in this ideology and acts as a kind of key that both locks and unlocks the door to American citizenship and belonging.

IV. National Identity and Nature

The idea of nature in America has always served as a receptacle for idealistic projections about American purity. As Lawrence Buell argues, “In the antebellum period, the link between American cultural identity and exurban and preindustrial spaces became one of the enabling myths of American literary nationalism” (Environmental Imagination 56). Many thought that the pristine wilderness served as the Edenic material from which to build the new nation, literally and figuratively. In American Incarnation, Myra Jehlen argues that the physical fact of the continent allowed the nation to construct itself: “Americans saw themselves as building their civilization out of nature itself, as neither the analogue nor the translation of Natural Law but its direct expression” (3).

After the Revolution, Americans still considered the nation to be a “direct expression” of pure nature; however, anxiety ran high over how to form the new nation and who were appropriate citizens.

Reading nature symbolically can bypass the process of becoming American. Suggesting that such a “process” even exists (or existed in the nineteenth century) is questionable. Many critics do not see it as so, particularly in the nineteenth century when there was a strict demarcation between citizens and non-citizens, often based on race and

the safe locale to dangerous ground” (847). While citing the relationship between disease and place as the “most essential” element of epidemic panic, Humphreys ends up saying very little about why place is so important and what the ramifications of this are. Rather, her purpose is to articulate the factors that generate “panic” when epidemics arise.
gender, with little “border crossing” allowed. In this paradigm, nature was evoked as justification for such oppression. These essentialist assumptions based on nature made a worthy source of critical inquiry for literary critics, but part of the result of this inquiry was the oversimplification and dispossession of the topic of nature in American studies. While the primary texts analyzed in this dissertation might not fully achieve American belonging, they all make evident that belonging is figured as a time-contingent process of dwelling in nature.

Various spatial metaphors represent dwelling, and some figurative devices, like metonymy, create a bridge between the imaginary and the real. As Paul Alpers explains, “Metonymic connections derive from contiguity – unlike metaphor, which connects objects or phenomena by perceived likenesses, or synecdoche, which claims an inherent relation of part to whole” (337). Building belonging through proximity and contingency with nature becomes a two-way street, however. Contingency between person and place can act as a thoroughfare to belonging, or for those who wish to maintain the status quo, this contingency can be a path that needs containment.

V. The Intersecting History of Sanitarianism, Race Theory, and Environmentalism

In *The Gospel of Germs*, Nancy Tomes explains how germ theory affected human behavior of the early twentieth century. She writes,

Between the 1880s and the 1920s Americans of all ages were subjected to aggressive public health campaigns that taught them the new lessons of the laboratory: that microscopic living particles were the agents of contagion, that sick bodies shed germs into the environment, and that disease spread[s] by seemingly innocuous behaviors such as coughing, sneezing, and spitting, sharing common drinking cups, or failing to wash hands before eating. (7)
These “aggressive” health campaigns came down on the shoulders of American women, who became responsible for insuring cleanliness in the home and rearing their children accordingly. While these health campaigns had very real physical effects on disease control, they became inflected with cultural bias. Presented and executed under the guise of nationalism, a certain racist nativism came with these health campaigns.

While some foreign immigrants did indeed transmit diseases into the U.S., this physical fact took on a whole new life in the public imagination. Rather than see immigrants as individuals, nativists conceived of immigrant groups as agents of disease: “the entire group is stigmatized by medicalized nativism” (Kraut 3). Alan Kraut argues that this “medicalized nativism” was merely a justification for a bias that already existed: “The medicalization of preexisting nativist prejudices occurs when the justification for excluding members of a particular group includes charges that they constitute a health menace and may endanger their hosts” (2). But the threat of transmission goes beyond epidemic diseases.

As individuals become synecdoches of their race and their bodies act as vectors, everything that the body contains becomes figuratively transmissible, making race itself a kind of transmissible disease. Twentieth-century understandings of race differ from nineteenth-century theories of race. George Stocking remarks, “Those of us today who are sophisticated in the concepts of the behavioral sciences have lost the richly connotative nineteenth-century sense of ‘race’ as accumulated cultural differences carried somehow in the blood” (6). This Lamarckian model of acquired traits includes character as well as characteristics. Stocking explains, “there was not a clear line between cultural
and physical elements or between social and biological heredity” (6). This confusing model leads to the conflation of what today we might call nationalities or ethnicities with “race.”

Thus, while many immigrants were of “white” heritage, they were still discriminated against because of their supposedly racialized “nature.” In nineteenth-century America, citizenship was created out of a series of exclusionary principles. The Naturalization Law of 1790 granted citizenship to “free white persons” – a title that specifically came to mean white men of Anglo-Saxon heritage, while women, immigrants, Native Americans, and African Americans were excluded from this elite status.7 Citizenship granted more than voting privileges, as the social hierarchy of America placed citizens at the top of the social ladder. Matthew Frye Jacobson explains that the ability to self-govern and the capacity to defend one’s property and nation against potential enemies of the state were early requirements of American citizens, and both of these requirements were granted on the basis of (perceived) race. Jacobson argues that the nation had an “untroubled republican equation of whiteness with fitness for self-government” (38). In addition, he writes, “in practice the idea of citizenship had become thoroughly entwined with the idea of ‘whiteness’ (and maleness) because what a citizen really was, at bottom, was someone who could help put down a slave rebellion or participate in Indian wars” (25). Thus, citizens had to maintain the boundaries of the citizen and the nation, keeping non-citizens “in their place” outside of an idealized

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7 When it comes to the broad category of “immigrants,” Jacobson explains that between 1840 and 1920 ideas about whiteness change, as the idea of solidarity between all “white” persons is exchanged for a hierarchical system of white races (42-3).
American identity. Hence, the elite status of the citizen took shape not only by granting civil liberties to some, but by denying privileges to others. Toni Morrison argues in *Playing in the Dark* that an Africanist presence lingers in American literature, as those who live in the background give form to those who live in the foreground, by serving as a constant reminder of what the citizen is not. I would add that this is the case not only for African Americans, but also for other non-citizens (immigrants, women, Native Americans, etc.) in the nineteenth century.

While sanitarianism is a panacea for the problem of contamination from the foreign born, environmentalism became a cure for spatial contamination. Ecocritic Lawrence Buell notes how the beginnings of environmentalism coincide with sanitary reform, and the two are not separate or distinct modes of thought (8). As Buell comments when discussing the similarities between John Muir and Jane Addams, “…the two visions belong in the same history, the same conversation, the same narrative” (18). Buell discusses the similarities and differences in environmental preservation movements and environmental justice activism. He argues that “the two persuasions share the conviction that the biological environment ought to be more pristine than it is, ought to be healthy, soul-nurturing habitat” (38). This concept of a pure, clean environment to live in as a basic American right is evident in both environmentalism and sanitarianism.

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8 Environmental preservationists are those that believe nature should be protected as a value in itself, while environmental justice activism tends to have a more anthropocentric view concerned with human health in relation to environment – this is often called a utilitarian approach.

9 Sanitarianism refers to the sanitary reform movement of the late nineteenth century, and it also refers to the ideology behind urban cleanliness – in which national methods of purification referred to more than dirty homes. They also referred to the impurities of the other, in mind and body, which threatened to mix with citizens and their soil.
The advent of the environmental movement of the early twentieth century is best characterized by the debate between conservationists and preservationists. While there are a lot of similarities and intersections between the concepts, there were ardent public debates regarding the motivation and execution of environmental protection.

Conservationists, like Gifford Pinchot, argued that environmental resources should be conserved for future use and the approach toward conservation should be utilitarianism, yielding the greatest good for the greatest number of people. John Muir’s preservationism, in contrast, was more of a spiritual approach to nature, arguing for the preservation of spaces against human development and the maintenance or restoration of their original state. These debates during Teddy Roosevelt’s administration were very public; the institution of preservationism is evident in the national parks movement, while conservationism seemed to win out through Roosevelt’s policies.

Common knowledge typically interprets the rise of environmentalism during Roosevelt’s administration as a reaction to industrialization. The destruction of nature from the rise of industry during the nineteenth century led to a mythical attachment to a supposedly unspoiled pastoral space. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx argues that American literature often depicts the desire for the “pastoral ideal,” which is the middle state: a cultivated garden somewhere between wilderness and a highly-developed civilization. Marx depicts “the machine in the garden” as the image of a locomotive screaming through a rural landscape, commonly found in antebellum literature and art. The locomotive or the machine acts as a “counterforce,” a disruption that interrupts the peaceful scene, symbolizing anxiety over industrialization and change. Marx writes, “For
it is industrialization, represented by images of machine technology, that provides the counterforce in the American archetype of the pastoral design” (26). While I do not disagree that ecocentrism and environmentalism react to industry, I would like to complicate this belief. Marx’s “counterforce” can take other forms. Disruption is also often figured as the other, as when the immigrant body threatens to wipe out an authentic American identity in Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843*. Furthermore, natural environments can also disrupt nationalism by refusing nation formation, as in Herman Melville’s “The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles.”

My first chapter, “The Peculiar Associations of Herman Melville’s ‘Encantadas’: Nature and National Allegory,” explores how Melville disrupts nation formation by abstaining from traditional representations of nature and subverting national allegory. Melville’s “The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles” allegorizes the (de)construction of America into a nation state, representing the island environment of the Galapagos not as a pure Edenic landscape containing the perfect raw and metaphorical material out of which to build a nation, but rather as the unstable and contested battleground between nature and culture. In addition, Melville depicts an environment that does not posit the natural world and human beings as separate categories; instead he blurs the boundaries of this false distinction and breaks down the notion of “civilization” itself. Place naming, mapping, generating a national allegory, and engaging theories of “civilization” are all methods necessary to nation formation. Melville subverts these methods by inverting the allegory, uncivilizing the “civilized,” and dislocating location. He reveals the “peculiar
associations” between nationalism and place, associations that are forced rather than natural.

The second chapter, “‘The very oak trees will not know them apart’: Race and Environment in Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau,” explores the Transcendentalists’ desire for an authentic experience in nature to generate a sense of belonging with the land and the nation. Margaret Fuller’s travelogue *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* reveals an unsettling ambivalence toward the indigene and the immigrant, and their interactions with the land. Fuller tries to appropriate the metonymic relationship Native Americans have with the American environment, since their long proximity with the land contains the authentic belonging she desires. However, her attempts to appropriate this relationship are disrupted by the Midwestern immigrant, who connects to nature by using it for its commercial value, not for nature’s “tales of the origins of things.” The replacement of Native Americans with immigrants is therefore figured as a complete erasure of American identity, as “the very oak trees will not know them apart,” not know the difference between the immigrant and the indigenous. By comparing Fuller’s work to Thoreau’s *Walden*, I make clear that the two authors devise very different ideas about the environment. Thoreau sees nature as an ever resilient entity, while Fuller sees it as vulnerable and in need of preservation. Authentic experience supposedly begins in nature, according to her transcendental philosophy, but Fuller’s text questions whether nature can hold on to this authenticity as the nation replaces Native Americans with immigrants.
In my third chapter, “Conservation and Cleanliness: Racial and Environmental Purity in Ellen Richards and Charlotte Perkins Gilman,” I analyze Ellen H. Richards’ 1910 scientific treatise entitled *Euthenics: the Science of Controllable Environment*, which promotes environmental cleanliness and the purification of American identity. *Euthenics* interprets race with a biological lens, targeting foreign immigrants. “Contaminated” foreigners threaten much more than the physical health of the nation’s citizens: in this text immigrants jeopardize the *home*, and through it the nation, by carrying and spreading dangerous and invisible germs and undesirable blood lines. Richards depicts the immigrant body as a threat to the *spaces* of America, suggesting an association between environmental and racial purity, which can also be found in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*. While critics have discussed how Gilman’s female utopia promotes eugenics, few have noted how Gilman, like Richards, associates a clean environment with a clean race. Gilman’s earlier work “The Yellow Wallpaper” explores the obsession with containing an infectious agent like the narrator, who threatens to disrupt the status quo, illustrating the continuity between body, mind, and space evident in sanitarianism. *Herland* takes it a step further by clearly linking sanitarianism to environmental conservationism. Here, Gilman does not replicate Richards’ *synecdoche*, where the home represents the nation; rather, the female body is the space of the nation, for in this utopia, body and space are extensions of each other. These texts illustrate how American women were called upon to secure the borders of the home, to sanitize and preserve this space for the future citizens of the nation, maintaining the “boundaries” of whiteness and the “purity” of the home.
Sanitarianism gives rise to a mode of preservationism, commonly found in regionalist writing of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the fourth chapter, “‘How can I grow pure?’: Domestic Preservationism in Muir, Cather, and Du Bois,” I explore how a domesticated version of environmental preservationism became a method of assimilation for marginalized characters. John Muir’s preservationism employs the language of sanitarianism, emphasizing the purity, cleanliness, and home-like quality of the wilderness. Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* and W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* appropriate some of Muir’s principles, as well as the ideals of sanitarianism. By dwelling in, loving, and working nature, the main characters in these texts assimilate into American culture. They perform as sanitary agents themselves, transforming marginalized spaces, a swamp and an untamable prairie, into productive, valuable spaces. These characters “grow pure” by transforming nature into sanitized, productive space, a cleansing achieved by loving and dwelling in nature. With the taming of human and environmental “wildness,” Du Bois and Cather suggest that marginalized characters can become American by adhering to domestic preservationism.

There is a lot at stake here. In addition to the ways that we think about race and “Americanness,” the mutual constructions of space and race affect our relationship to nature. If the environment is viewed as a reflection of our collective identity, then how can we ever view it as an entity that acts separately from ourselves? Furthermore, with environmentalism rising out of nationalist attempts to construct a pure unified nation, our modern environmentalism inherited a skewed idea of spatial purity, resulting in a method of border control: keep the desirable in and the undesirable out in order to preserve the
environment and the national body from contamination. By reuniting the interconnected ideologies of environmentalism, sanitarianism, and nationalism, this dissertation reveals our longstanding anxiety over the porosity between body and space. This anxiety is contingent on the cultural construction of purity, and it will only be through the critical analysis of this construction that the contingency between space and race can be unhinged.
CHAPTER ONE

THE PECULIAR ASSOCIATIONS OF MELVILLE’S ‘ENCANTADAS’: NATURE AND NATIONAL ALLEGORY

Although Herman Melville’s 1854 “The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles” poses as a piece of travel literature, it is far more than a simple account of the Galapagos Islands. Turning the islands into an allegory of American nation formation and critiquing the appropriation of nature into the national identity, Melville demonstrates the tension between nationalism and environment.10 Through ten sketches, Melville describes an island environment that does not resemble a pure Edenic landscape containing the perfect raw and metaphorical material to build a nation; instead, he creates a world that represents the unstable and contested battleground between nature and culture. Rather than assigning the natural world and human beings to distinct categories, Melville blurs the boundaries of this false distinction, breaking down the notion of “civilization” itself.

10 *Putnam’s Magazine* published “The Encantadas, or the Enchanted Isles” in 1854 after the critical and financial failures of *Moby-Dick* and *Pierre*. This south sea narrative revisits the islands Melville explored in 1841 and was well received. Interpretations of “The Encantadas” have proliferated with very little consensus. Few critics can agree on the overall structure, theme, or even genre of the text. Melville not only researched the history of the Galapagos (including Darwin’s *A Naturalist’s Voyage aboard the HMS Beagle*), but also drew upon personal experience, having traveled to the islands on a whaling vessel. The novella brought Melville good reviews. Some critics argue that Melville’s fragile psychological state of the 1850s influenced the darkness of “The Encantadas.” Jill Gidmark remarks that “the Encantadas” contains the “mental image of the tormented and frustrated writer he had become” (83). While many see the natural setting as a mere projection screen for Melville’s tormented psyche, I argue that nature is hardly a passive screen in this text.
Boundaries have taken center stage in recent critical debates that focus on the need for a transnational approach to criticism in order to diffuse the myth of American exceptionalism. In “Transnationalism and Classic American Literature” Paul Giles argues in favor of a transnational approach in order to dissolve the idea that the U.S. is an isolated and unique entity unaffected and superior to other nations. He writes, “To problematize the geographical integrity of the United States is, inevitably, also to problematize the ‘natural’ affiliation of certain values with a territory that can no longer be regarded as organically complete or self-contained” (64). This new focus on space and geography, however, rarely yields discussions about nature or the environment, as if rereading the national in terms of the transnational results in a purely cultural space isolated from the environment.

This chapter proposes that rereading American nationalism through an ecocritical perspective can further demystify national myths, but it requires revisiting what many critics have condemned as one of the roots of American exceptionalism: the relationship between nationalism and nature. Traditional interpretations of nature and nationalism in American literature focus on the idea of “nature’s nation,” which suggests that writers built American character out of the natural landscape, as the “uninhabited” wilderness of North America made the nation unique and authentic.11

While there are multiple theories regarding the relationship between nature and nation in American literature, the idea of “nature’s nation” dominates the others,

11 This term comes from Perry Miller’s benchmark text *Nature’s Nation*; Miller argues that as a newly formed nation, America lacked an identity and authors like James Fenimore Cooper solved this problem by investing the landscape with national importance: “The vastness of the continent, its very emptiness, instead of meaning that we are blank and formless, makes us deeply interesting amid our solitudes” (11).
contributing to Giles view of exceptionalism discussed above. Howard Horwitz labels this indwelling American-ness the “immanent” interpretation of nature, adding that this theory ascribes nature with “a positive and determinate value or possibility, available as a model of virtue” (9). Critic Perry Miller points out that nature’s immanence was thought to be “ubiquitous” in American literature, and I would add that it is this interpretation that dominates historical and critical readings of nature in American literature as well (201).

Historically, the idea of nature’s immanence is most evident in Frederick Jackson Turner’s, “The Significance of the Frontier in American History.” In this 1893 essay, Turner declares the frontier to be the single most important factor influencing American identity. He writes, “The existence of an area of free land, its continuous recession and the advance of American settlement westward, explain American development” (1). This receding western border allowed the moment of discovery to occur over and over again: “American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character” (2-3). Turner suggests that it was through the transformation of the wilderness into civilization that the European man became American (4). Written around the turn of the Twentieth Century, Turner’s thesis historicized the already well-entrenched idea of Manifest Destiny. Coined by John O’Sullivan in 1845, Manifest Destiny suggested that Americans had the God given right and responsibility to go West and develop the continent.
Based on the principle of Manifest Destiny and Turner’s historical reading of the frontier, several literary critics have studied the immanent quality of the American environment. While Turner suggests that the European became American through a process of dwelling and converting the land, these literary critics focus on the symbolic power of nature in American literature, often downplaying or bypassing Turner’s idea of process. In his landmark text *Virgin Land: the American West as Symbol and Myth*, Henry Nash Smith focuses on Turner’s concept of the West and Westward expansion as the enabling symbol of American identity, tracing the symbol through American literature and exploring the effect this symbol has on “the consciousness of Americans” (4). More recently and in a similar vein, Myra Jehlen’s *American Incarnation* argues that America’s lack of history prompted a turn to nature in the early years of the republic. She writes, “the decisive factor shaping the founding conceptions of ‘America’ and of ‘the American’ was material rather than conceptual; rather than a set of abstract ideas, the physical fact of the continent” (3). Geography was so important to the formation of the nation, according to Jehlen, that “When the liberal ideal fused with the material landscape, it produced an ‘America’ that was not allegory, for its meaning was not detachable, but symbol, its meaning inherent in its matter” (my emphasis, 9). Like Horwitz’s theory of imminence, Jehlen’s emphasis on “symbol” here, and “incarnation”

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12 While Smith is arguably the most canonical of these critics, others have written on the symbolic quality of nature from slightly different perspectives. For example, Roderick Nash’s *Wilderness and the American Mind*, argues that “Wilderness was the basic ingredient of American civilization. From the raw materials of the physical wilderness Americans built a civilization; with the idea or symbol of wilderness they sought to give that civilization identity and meaning” (xv). Nash studies the ways that “wilderness” as a concept and symbol has changed over time in America.
in her title, suggests that American-ness was found in the continent: the land physically embodied and symbolized the essence of “America” and “American.”

Jehlen does allow for the fact that fiction wrestles with the idea of “incarnation” however. Based on a reading of Emerson, Jehlen explains that American incarnation indicates that “America” already exists in perfect form, because it is inherent in the land, and it only needs to be discovered. The artist, according to Jehlen, challenges this principle because his creation forms an alternative world, and regardless of the author’s intention (whether he is trying to affirm or deconstruct the idea of “America”) the mere creation of a fictional alternative undermines the discovered world. Jehlen explains, “the basic demands of fiction conflict with the ideology of discovery” (134). This is a conflict between imagining the nation as discovered versus created. “Discovered,” in this sense, means that the land already was quintessentially American: it did not need to be converted into America. Characterizing America in Thomas Jefferson’s Notes on the State of Virginia, Jehlen writes,

He [Jefferson] marshals abundant proof of exceptionally rich agricultural and extractive resources, of a stable political system, and generally of a yet untapped potential. At first coolly reasonable, his statistical rigor grows impassioned – but not because he has risen from fact gathering to political pleading. On the contrary, he has sunk below facts, to the contemplation of a deeper level of what he takes to be America’s nature – the level at which America is precisely not in the process of becoming viable or valuable because it has been what it is, as a natural given, all along. (44)

This “natural given” suggests that the nation automatically exists because of the inherent quality of the land: it only needs to be discovered. In contrast, “creating” a nation would mean a state of process that is time-contingent and possibly contested, as humans and the
environment interact in unpredictable ways, and it is this latter idea that appears in “The Encantadas.” For Jehlen, as for me, fiction wrestles with the idea of incarnation.

While Jehlen allows for the fact that artists like Melville do not adhere to the idea of nature as American symbol, her primary interest is in the relationship between individualism and national identity. Conversely, my critical interest is the relation between environmentalism and national identity. Particularly, in this chapter, my critical interest is in the way the imminent view of nature and the “ideology of discovery” are undercut by Melville’s account of the environment, an account displaying an alternative view of the environmental imagination. By refusing a symbolic (imminent) reading of nature, employing and subverting an allegory of nationalism, and displaying the “peculiar associations” required to become part of a given place, Melville suggests that national identity is not automatically conveyed (as Jehlen suggests), nor is it necessarily full of

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13 Essentially, the difference between Jehlen’s work and mine is one of focus, as well as subject matter. Jehlen writes, “by assuming the American land (not the landscape but the land), the American man acquired an individualist substance….It made him both ideally self-reliant and self-sufficient” (13-14). According to Emerson, individualism develops by being in nature, and Jehlen argues, “Such being is really the apotheosis of becoming (amounting to the fulfillment of history in History). It co-opts the dynamic of process and masses time…into an endless landscape in which the self travels at will” (14). In this way, Jehlen focuses on the development of individualism and national identity found through incarnation. In many ways, my analysis of Melville confirms her overall thesis, because Melville acts as an exception that proves the rule. My interest, however, is in how the environmental imagination is affected by the relationship between nationalism and nature. Opposed to the “becoming” described by Jehlen above – which “co-opts process,” “masses time,” and allows the individual’s “will” to control nature – I look at literature that represents becoming, as a time-contingent process of dwelling in nature. These representations can generate nationalism, or, as in the case with Melville, threaten it. By showing that, for many authors, national identity was not automatically conferred through a symbolic nature but was rather developed through a contested relationship with the environment, I hope to show how dwelling opened up an opportunity for assimilation to the marginalized, but also became a process in need of policing for those in power. As nature gets yoked to this process, so does the way we imagine the environment.

14 Lawrence Buell uses this term in his *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture*. The environmental imagination refers to the collective history of human conceptions of the environment, a history influenced by fiction as well as non-fiction. Buell argues, “How we image a thing, true or false, affects our conduct toward it, the conduct of nations as well as persons” (3).
positive value (as Horwitz discussed). Melville suggests that national identity requires a process of becoming, a process that nature may not welcome, even though history suggests it will.

Refusing this symbolic interpretation of nature, Melville allegorically layers a pseudo-American narrative of discovery and nationalization over a completely different geographical space – the Galapagos. Allegory grants the author the ability to detach this narrative from the space that supposedly bore it (America), demonstrating that, for Melville, nation formation may not be generated by the particularity of North America, suggesting that nations are made not discovered, undercutting the premise of Manifest Destiny and the symbolic, immanent reading of nature. As a creation, the nation struggles to take shape, and nature does not necessarily cooperate with that struggle.

Melville gets this idea across not only by employing allegory opposed to symbol, but also by refusing to allow the national allegory to fully take shape, a refusal accomplished by the disruptive environment of the text. While reading national allegory into the text might overshadow the particularity of the Galapagos, it should not. Melville emphasizes this particular landscape by writing a text about a real location and by using a characteristically realistic genre, the travelogue. As J. Hillis Miller argues in *Topographies*, authors use real places to anchor texts in the real world (19). Miller contends, “the landscape in a novel is not just an indifferent background where the action takes place. The landscape is an essential determinant of that action” (16). In this text, the land refuses to allow any nation to form, and thus Melville’s representation of the natural environment exceeds the national allegory. Therefore, Melville suggests that
representing nature is not always a one directional project toward unified national identity; rather, images and narratives of nature can also disrupt the cohesion of a homogeneous state.

I. Making and Discovering the Nation: a Dialectic between Nature and Culture

Defining nature and culture is no easy task, particularly because the terms have intersecting definitions. “Nature” may be one of the most ambiguous terms in the English language with its wide ranging connotations. The word can denote an organic, non-human world, or it can be a referent to an organic world that includes human beings. Raymond Williams groups the various definitions of nature into three categories: “(i) the essential quality and character of something; (ii) the inherent force which directs either the world or human beings or both; (iii) the material world itself, taken as including or not including human beings” (Keywords 219). The latter category is what will be the focus here; the material world including human beings, but not their technologies. As Kate Soper puts it; nature is “those material structures and processes that are independent of human activity (in the sense that they are not a humanly created product), and whose forces and causal powers are the necessary condition of every human practice” (132-3). While “culture” has equally wide ranging connotations, what will be important to this project is the interaction, difference, and tension between the two terms. Hence, “culture” here refers to a composite way of life and the discursive practices that generate that life, including man-made technologies and the arts.15

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15 For more on the wide ranging definitions of “culture” see Raymond Williams Culture and Society 1780-1950 or Terry Eagleton’s The Idea of Culture.
The tension between nature and culture has been exacerbated by the influx of postmodernism, which typically takes a culturalist approach to explaining the world, suggesting that there is no nature, only culture. Terry Eagleton explains, “There is a well-entrenched postmodern doctrine that the natural is no more than an insidious naturalization of culture” (93). In opposition to this postmodern sentiment, I agree with Eagleton who argues that we are both natural and cultural beings, and that our “helpless physical nature is such that culture is a necessity if we are to survive. Culture is the ‘supplement’ which plugs a gap at the heart of our nature, and our material needs are then reinflected in its terms” (99). Nature and culture, as Eagleton suggests, have a dialectical relationship: each continually refashions the other. L. Katherine Hayles devises a theory of “constrained constructivism,” explaining that while we are limited by our cultural context in the world, or what Hayles calls “positionality,” we still interact with our environment. Granted, some interactions with the world are more consistent than others, leading to an idea of “reality.” She adds, however, that “embodied experience constructs a world, not the world” (my emphasis, 51). Melville suggests a similar view, allowing for a conceptualization of nature that is not as anthropocentric as “nature’s nation.” By suggesting that nature is an active entity and not simply a projection screen for the self, authors like Melville open up the relationship between nature and human beings to a theory of interarticulation.

In fact, while I focus on how the text resembles American nation formation, no one nation can take ownership of this discovery narrative or the place it represents, and undercutting the ownership of the Galapagos begins to wedge nature away from
nationalism. “The Encantadas” take place in the Galapagos, but makes references to South America, Spain, Great Britain, ancient Rome, and the United States. Eric Wertheimer argues convincingly that “The Encantadas” really represents “a torturous Spanish history” (152). Although the Galapagos certainly do represent the history of Spanish exploration and discovery, I would add that the text makes a transnational critique, since it gestures towards the United States through its allusions to slavery (which I will discuss in detail below) and the references to the War of 1812 and the U.S. _Essex_.

As Darryl Hattenhauer suggests, “As a promised land, the Encantadas are part of the New World frontier, part of the arena for European expansion into ostensibly infinite space. The characters in ‘The Encantadas’ represent the nations that dominated exploration and colonization in the New World” (121). Therefore, no one nation owns this narrative of discovery and failed civilization, and it is unclear exactly who _belongs_ to the Encantadas, as none of the inhabitants ever effectively build a long-term home on the islands. In this allegorical and transnational method, Melville diffuses ideas of national exceptionalism, American or any other kind, and critiques nation formation and “civilization” in general.

In addition, Melville himself did not really take ownership of the narrative. While he rarely used pen names, he originally published the story serially in Putnam’s magazine under the pseudonym Salvatore R. Tarnmoor, although he later dropped the pseudonym when the story was anthologized in _The Piazza Tales_ (Gidmark 84). The use of a fictional narrator illustrates that Melville did not wish the sketches to be taken as fact. Several critics have explored the connotations of “Tarnmoor’s” roots. The combination of “tarn” and “moor” alludes to a mountain lake and vast tract of land respectively,
evoking the gothic style of authors like Edgar Allan Poe (Hattenhauer 119). Jonathan Beecher adds that Melville took the first name and middle initial from the seventeenth-century landscape painter Salvator Rosa, thus playing up the idea of the picturesque in the novella (89).

The picturesque and the idea of landscape incorporate the dialectic between nature and culture which Melville wishes to employ. Many nineteenth-century travel writers would include small drawings to help depict their journeys. Melville did not do this, but he figuratively paints his “sketches” (opposed to chapters) with words throughout the novella. Like the combining of “tarn” and “moor,” the picturesque is a style that incorporates landscape:

The concept of landscape provides a useful means for understanding the workings of natural terrain. John Berger describes landscape as a ‘way of seeing.’ Inherently duplicitous, the term ‘landscape’ refers both to this visual perspective and to the geographical territories that are seized by it. Landscapes articulate both culture and nature, seer and scene. But equally at stake in landscape are the embodied practices that transform the objects of a proprietary gaze. (Moore, Pandian, Kosek 11)

While such a dialectic opens up both sides of the nature/culture dichotomy, it typically favors the perspective of the viewer. Melville draws upon this visual technique most deliberately when he frames the death of Hunilla’s husband and brother: “the better to watch the adventure of those two hearts she loved, Hunilla had withdrawn the branches to one side, and held them so. They formed an oval frame, through which the bluely boundless sea rolled like a painted one” (110). Her two family members die silently as she watches through the branches: “Death in a silent picture” (110). The picturesque often invokes the dominance of the viewer over nature because the technique restricts
nature to a frame. In this scene, the picturesque may flatten the dynamics of the scene, but the ocean does what a painting cannot, inflicting great pain upon the now stranded Hunilla. Thus while Melville uses the cultural motif of the picturesque to engage the dialectic between nature and culture, he is careful not to undercut the power of nature with a cultural gaze.

In addition to using the picturesque, Melville layers multiple genres, playing into the dubious character of the text. He mixes fiction and non-fiction; “The Encantadas” appears like a traditional non-fiction travel narrative, but is infused with fictional stories, historical references, ecological references, and poetry. The text is also influenced by Melville’s own experiences in the region, as he traveled there in 1841. Each chapter begins by referring to the visual and poetic arts: the chapters are “sketches” that begin with a poetic epigraph, most drawn from Spencer’s *The Faerie Queen*. Jill Gidmark argues that Melville “elevates his prose with the poetry of Spencer, William Collins, and Thomas Chatterton, and then debases it with banter from the buccaneer William Cowley and the whaling-ground explorer Captain James Colnett” (85). Indeed, his use of Spencer almost seems out of place with the tone of the text. The narrator also refers to history books, like *Porter’s Voyage into the Pacific*, and he supplements written histories with the oral histories he has heard from other sailors (132). In addition, this text seems to be influenced by Washington Irving’s *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.* William Stowe highlights how Irving “helped establish the conventions of a popular form of quasi-literary nineteenth-century non-fiction” (note 4, 244). Tarnmore, like Irving’s

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16 All epigraphs are from Spencer’s *Faerie Queen* except sketches five and six from Spencer’s satires, *Mother Hubbards Tale* and “Visions of the World’s Vanities” respectively (Newbery).
Crayon, is both historian and storyteller, quoting Spencer’s poetry and external sources, while also giving his own commentary. Melville layers these different story-telling methods because he wants to demonstrate that all ways of organizing and comprehending the world are always partial.

The lack of narrative and national ownership of the text, the use of the picturesque, and the mixed genre of the text deconstruct the border between nature and culture. All three methods can be cultural attempts to “capture” this environment (in figurative form in the text, for the nation, or for the viewer), but the way Melville handles these methods suggests that the Encantadas are not capturable.

II. Dislocating Location

In addition to the uncertain ownership and genre of the text, the material instability of this island environment also generates ambiguity. Jehlen’s assertion that the “physical fact” of the continent gave rise to “America” is contradicted by the instability of these islands. When Melville tries to historicize the mapping process of the Galapagos, he describes the difficulty navigators had trying to locate the islands. The winds and currents of the area were so unpredictable that they disoriented navigators. In the 1800s people thought that the Encantadas were two distinct and separate groups of islands. He writes, “And this apparent fleetingness and unreality of the locality of the isles was most probably one reason for the Spaniards calling them the Encantada, or Enchanted Group” (73). The unmapable nature of the Encantadas reflects what J. Hillis Miller calls the “atopical,” which he describes as being “a place that is everywhere and nowhere, a place you cannot get to from here” (7). But this quality also leads to their
naming, an act which hails them into place. Place names have profound meaning according to Miller, who claims, “The power of the conventions of mapping and of the projection of place names on the place are so great that we see the landscape as though it were already a map, complete with place names and the names of geographical features. The place names seem to be intrinsic to the places they name. The names are motivated” (4). Thus the act of naming the islands brings their atopical, un-locatableness into (fictive) location. Once they are named, they can be called upon again, suggesting that these islands, which are difficult to find, can be found. While place names “seem to be intrinsic to the places they name,” it is this seeming that is an interesting point of inquiry.

The “seeming intrinsic” quality of place names only develops over time, which suggests it is not “intrinsic” at all. Place names are metonymic, as the association over time between the signifier and signified eventually seems justified, while in actuality the relationship may be arbitrary and unmotivated. For example, the fleeting quality of the Encantadas motivated the original name, Spanish “encantadas” referring to the “enchanted” quality of the islands. While Melville explains the fleetingness of the islands and how that quality generated their name, he also immediately undermines this fleeting quality a paragraph later by stating, “However wavering their place may seem by reason of the currents, they themselves, at least to one upon the shore, appear invariably the same: fixed, cast, glued into the very body of cadaverous death” (73). In other words, the location of the islands is completely contingent on the perspective of the viewer, appearing stable to one on land and fleeting to one on a ship. These contradictory descriptions suggest that even something as apparently solid as a landmass is not
necessarily easy to see, classify, or understand. The ideology of “nature’s nation,” in contrast, suggests that the continent is physically and inherently stable. As the scaffolding to build the nation upon, it should not move, nor should its symbolic or innate quality waver in any way. Thus, the environment of the Enchanted Isles disrupts nation formation through its “uninhabitable” and unstable ground. With this environmental disruption, Melville suggests that nature does not necessarily yield to civilization, even though the principles of Manifest Destiny suggest it would, and furthermore this instability questions the innate character of land.

Today the islands are still referred to by this name, even though this fleeting quality no longer exists. Indeed, in the age of GPS devices anyone can locate the Encantadas. This forces the question, was this quality ever “intrinsic” to the isles in the first place? Clearly, it was not, since this essence has become a quality of legend rather than fact. Thus, the name Encantadas is specific to a historic moment and a particular group of Spanish explorers; the name represents the relationship between the perceiver and perceived. In addition, Melville’s decision to favor the names “Encantadas” or “Enchanted Isles” over “Galapagos” might suggest that he was most interested in capturing the isles at the moment of discovery, before colonization, before the Encantadas lost their “enchanted” or “fleeting” quality, well before they became a premier location of eco-tourism as they are today.

This suggests that the “names are motivated,” but only in a historically contingent sense. The isles have multiple names, just as the novella’s title has. The text entitled “The Encantadas, or Enchanted Isles” is an act of translation for Melville, as he
refers both to their Spanish name given by the Spanish discoverers of the isles and its English translation. The translated title is historically motivated, as already discussed, but place naming is also a language act often associated with imperialism. The individual islands were named after Spanish royalty and English noblemen. Today the islands are part of Ecuador’s national park system, officially called the Archipiélago de Colón; a name that ironically grants Columbus final “ownership” over the isles, although Melville makes no mention of him and Columbus never toured the isles. Ecuador gave each individual island an official Spanish name as well. However, these national names are rarely used, and the old names still dominate common practice. Ecologists, in particular, have continued to use the names that were common during Darwin’s time, and hence Ecuador’s newer place names have not taken hold over the space, while Darwin’s research and legacy has held on. This suggests that colonial expansion and science have motivated the place naming of the Enchanted Isles, perhaps more than the isles’ natural characteristics.

In addition, Melville rarely refers to the isles by their most common name, the Galapagos, an act of deletion that seems worthy of analysis. The name Galapagos comes from the Spanish name for the famous tortoises found on the islands, “galapagos” meaning “saddle” in Spanish. These tortoises have become a symbol that proliferates in meaning both within Melville’s text and without it. Over a hundred years after the publication of Melville’s text, the Galapagos tortoise has recently resumed its symbolic journey by becoming a “conservation icon” (Nicholls). The last known living Galapagos tortoise was discovered in 1971; aptly named “Lonesome George,” he has been the topic
of vast environmental attempts to continue a species that was already classified as “extinct,” after years of hunting from sea mariners had put them on the brink of extinction. As Henry Nicholls elegantly puts it, “Before he was discovered, the Pinta tortoise was assumed extinct. George brought hope – and thousands of tourists. But as each year comes and goes, it looks more and more like George is the only one of his kind left on earth – a symbol of the devastation man has wrought to the natural world in the Galápagos and beyond” (xvi). Hence, when the islands were originally named for the Galapagos tortoise, this was a name of discovery; now, however, the tortoise that motivated the name seems to represent not an emblem of discovery but a symbol of extinction. Ironically, Melville used the tortoise as a symbol of death back in the 1850s, when the tortoises were still abundant. This is evident when the narrator describes a dream he has about the isles: “I have seemed to see, slowly emerging from those imagined solitudes, and heavily crawling along the floor, the ghost of a gigantic tortoise with ‘Memento *****’ burning in live letters upon his back” (74). Here, the tortoise is dead as its ghost appears in the dream, but the letters burning in its back are “live.” This suggests that what the tortoise symbolizes will live far longer than the animal itself. Thus, “Galapagos” is a name that seems motivated and intrinsic to the isles, in Miller’s sense, as the tortoise is endemic to the isles and even while facing potential extinction it has more of a hold on the isles than ever.

Melville, however, avoids using the name “Galapagos,” favoring “Encantadas” or “Enchanted Isles.” This decision may be motivated by his desire to avoid the naturalization of place names. In addition, “Encantadas” brings together the view and the
viewer – the picturesque – whereas “Galapagos” is motivated by nature. In other words, the idea of “enchanted” isles demonstrates the deterioration of strict boundaries between nature and culture, a breakdown that Melville’s text maintains throughout. Dropping Galapagos from the title of the text and the place name of the archipelago allows Melville to display the interarticulation of nature and culture.

In order to avoid strict categorization, Melville uses multiple names, not only in the title of the whole, but also in the individual title of each sketch. Most of the islands were named after English noblemen. Out of the ten sketches, six through nine are about specific islands. Each of these sketches has a very deliberate two-part title, giving the name of the isle and the name of a specific inhabitant of the isle, such as “Barrington Isle and The Buccaneers.” This two-part structure says something about the relationship between man and environment. Melville cannot “map” the islands without describing their inhabitants, as these inhabitants change the landscape, but the only way to refer to the land is through hailing it by its sign, and these place names are not generated by the particularity of the isles, but by imperialism.

We seem to be tapping into the central question of literature as it represents nature. Since literature, and language for that matter, can only represent reality and the natural world, can nature really be present in literature? Is there anything we can learn about nature through texts, since all their work is mimetic? I concur with Miller’s analysis that representations of nature in texts are “both a making and a discovering” of nature. Texts create their own versions of real landscapes and affect the way humans imagine these places. Place names also do this. But when authors draw upon real
landscapes they do it deliberately. They do so because it grounds the text in reality and a
culture “that is rooted in the earth” (Miller 19). As Miller points out, “the landscape in a
novel is not just an indifferent background where the action takes place. The landscape is
an essential determinant of that action” (16). In this way, the particularity of the islands
does play a role in the story, which the allegorical narrative of nation formation might
hide. Hence there is a conflict here, between the allegory of nation formation and the
particularity of the Encantadas, a conflict that is representative of the way the nation calls
upon nature to act a certain way. But nature does not always cooperate, and it is this lack
of cooperation that is represented in the way Melville dislocates the location of “The
Encantadas.” As we have seen, Melville represents the isles as both out of place and in
place by his use of contradictory descriptions (they are both stable and fleeting) and his
manipulation of place names. Place naming is one of the preliminary steps to configuring
the borders of the nation and controlling nature, and Melville subverts this act. In “The
Encantadas” place names are layered, translated, and deleted all in an attempt to dislocate
this location.

III. Are “The Encantadas” an Allegory?

In the simplest terms, “The Encantadas” is and is not an allegory, fulfilling some
of the requirements of the genre and refusing to achieve others. This combined
adherence and defiance seems purposeful on Melville’s part, helping him call upon the
old scripts of existence and subvert them in an attempt to try something new. As already
described, “nature’s nation” is a symbolic understanding of the land, suggesting that
American identity is inherent in the physical environment, needing only to be uncovered.
In order to disrupt this idea, Melville employs allegory instead of symbol to convey a story of American nationalism. The national allegory is somewhat hidden, as Melville loosely weaves in allusions to America. For example, Melville makes direct references to “Daniel Boone,” the Adirondack Mountains, the U.S. *Essex*, and the War of 1812. He then makes more elaborate comparisons through the Oberlus sketch, which represents slavery, and the Dog-King sketch, representing American Revolution.

Allegories, unlike symbols, are detachable and transferable from their contexts or settings. Because the meaning of an allegory is found in the plot or narrative, allegories can be transplanted into different settings. The context does not produce the narrative; it just frames the story. The meaning of a symbol, however, is *in* the materiality of the symbol and is therefore not detachable from the object that bore its meaning. By suggesting that the nation is not organically produced out of nature (symbol), Melville implicitly suggests the American environment does not have this inherent quality. Melville then takes the issue of nature and nationalism a step further by representing the environment of the Galapagos as an entity that refuses to fully allow any nation to form, or even any individual to build a sense of belonging to this environment.

Allegories do not mean what they say. They refer beyond the literal, generating a kind of “double-talk” (Quilligan 27). In fact, it is because the literal reading is “absurd” or “incoherent” that we reach for another layer of meaning when reading an allegory (Quilligan 28). “The Encantadas” fits this description; while the literal reading would suggest this is simply a travel narrative, the text practically begs the reader to look beyond the literal. It is a story about the malevolence of humanity evident in the sketches
about the slave owning Oberlus, the cruelty of the Creole Dog-King, and the atrocities that face Hunilla the Chola-Widow. It clearly calls upon the larger context of colonial imperialism, including American nation formation in its stories about the discovery of the isles by Spanish explorers and the sketch about the U.S. *Essex* during the War of 1812.

While allegory is traditionally thought of as a method that pulls upon old stories of the past, some critics hold a more subversive view of allegory. For example, Bainard Cowan argues, “Allegory has arisen at moments in history when a people has found itself in a crisis of identity, its members seeing themselves as inheritors of a past tradition of such authority that the tradition is identified with their very name as a people, yet on the other hand finding much of that tradition morally or factually unacceptable” (11). America’s identity crisis occurs at the moment of discovery, since a cohesive American identity still needed to be created, and there was a desire to create something new, not recycled from the old habits of Europe. How to create something original, when America is a land of transplanted individuals? The turn to nature as opposed to history became the answer to this dilemma. But if nature is supposed to provide a new script to create a new civilization and abandon the old history, the landscape of the Galapagos presented in this text is not conducive to national production. Melville’s novella is more like a story of apocalypse, opposed to the beginning of a new civilization. In the opening paragraph the isles are depicted as “A group rather of extinct volcanoes than of isles; looking much as the world at large might, after a penal conflagration” (69). The isles resemble Dante’s
Inferno, looking like a living hell, rather than an Eden.\textsuperscript{17} Indeed, the text abounds with fatalism, but it is also a story of attempted beginnings. However, the attempt to forge new communities out of this volcanic landscape and a population of outcasts never succeeds.

Therefore, Melville’s text is an allegory because it displays this desire for a new script when the old ones have failed, but it is also an allegory, according to Cowan’s definition, because of the tension it displays. Cowan argues that Melville’s use of allegory in Moby-Dick expresses “the relation between the timely and the timeless,” and I would add that this technique also operates in “The Encantadas” (6). Symbolism is timeless: symbols do not lose their meaning over time, but allegories express the tension between the transcendent and the real. Thus to say that “The Encantadas” is an allegory of nation formation built out of nature means the text displays the tension between building a symbolic national identity and the timely reality that such a project might fail or that reality or nature will not allow it to happen. Thus, “The Encantadas” wrestles with the appropriation of a figurative nature into the national identity, displaying the tension between nature as figure and nature as material reality.

However, on many fronts the text fails to achieve allegorical status. Allegories typically contain a linear journey, like Ahab’s quest for the white whale in Moby-Dick. “The Encantadas,” however, has no journey, no purpose, no traditional narrative that organizes the whole. No object or moral is being sought. Rather than move in a linear

\textsuperscript{17} For more on the influence of Dante’s Inferno on the text see Robert Albrecht’s “The Thematic Unity of Melville’s ‘The Encantadas.’” Rodney Simard’s “More Black than Bright: the Allegorical Structure of Melville’s ‘The Encantadas’” and Jonathan Beecher’s “Variations on a Dystopian Theme: Melville’s ‘Encantadas’” provide in depth arguments regarding the hellish nature of the text.
pattern from beginning to end, this novella goes in circles around the isles, never really getting anywhere. As Michael Paul Rogin argues regarding *Moby-Dick*, Ahab’s allegorical quest of the whale organizes and drives this text opposed to Ishmael’s symbolic pattern that “reworks the lived world” (124-6). In “The Encantadas,” however, it is the *setting* that organizes the text opposed to the quest narrative. The setting has an allegorical quality because it gestures beyond its literal location of the Galapagos toward the “new world” collectively during the great age of sea exploration. Therefore there is an allegorical dimension to the setting of the text, but since the text lacks a traditional quest narrative, it is not a traditional allegory.

Allegories, furthermore, usually appeal to old texts, like the Christian allegory of redemption after the fall from Eden. Melville’s text is the opposite, resembling a story of hell on earth, where redemption never happens. This is a world where people fall and are rarely redeemed. So while the text is modeled on the great allegories of Spencer and Dante, unlike the *Inferno* where Vergil and Dante step out of hell, in “The Encantadas” the reader never leaves (Albrecht 464, 477). The one exception to this reading could be the sketch of the widow Hunilla, who is saved from the isles. Upon her return to the mainland, Tarnmoor writes, “The last seen of lone Hunilla she was passing into Payta town, riding upon a small gray ass; and before her on the ass’s shoulders, she eyed the jointed workings of the beast’s armorial cross” (Melville 121). While she is “saved” and presented as a Christological figure here, Hunilla lives with a heavy heart, “A heart of yearning in a frame of steel” (121). In this way Melville undercuts the redemptive trajectory of conventional allegory.
Finally, if this were an allegory of nation formation, that would mean that a nation would form and a sense of identity, home, and belonging would take shape between the characters and the isles. This of course does not happen in the text. Characters are taken in and spit out by the isles; no one belongs to them like the tortoises do. For example, out of the ten sketches, there are only three sketches about specific individuals and their interaction with the isles, which include the stories of the Dog-King, Chola Widow, and the Hermit Oberlus. While all three characters came to the isles for different reasons, one thing they all have in common is that each one is returned to the mainland, unable or unwilling to sustain a home out of the isles.

All of this leads to the conclusion that Melville is playing with the concept of allegory and not adhering to its boundaries. In this way, the text is like an inverted allegory, appropriating some aspects of the allegorical model and subverting some of its most characteristic qualities. By using place to organize this text, Melville generates tension between the literal location (Galapagos) and the metaphoric referent (the new world), displaying the tension between physical environments and cultural readings of nature. By creating and inverting the national allegory, Melville shows that not all representations of nature in nineteenth century texts enable national production.

IV. Tarnmoor’s Peculiar Associations

In order to partially ground this fantastic story to the real world, Melville inserts histories of the isles from other authors. Tarnmoor discusses his decision to include the particular histories of the U.S. *Essex*, the Buccaneers, and the works of Cowley, Colnet, and Porter within his travelogue.
by long cruising among the isles, tortoise-hunting upon their shores, and generally exploring them; for these and other reasons, the Essex became peculiarly associated with the Encantadas. Here be it said that you have but three eye-witness authorities worth mentioning touching the Enchanted Isles: - Cowley, the Buccaneer (1684); Colnet, the whaling-ground explorer (1798); Porter, the post captain (1813). Other than these you have but barren, bootless allusions from some few passing voyagers or compilers. (my emphasis, 95)

This “peculiar association” between the Essex and the isles is central to understanding Melville’s text. How do people and things become “associated” with place? Such a union usually requires long-term proximity to the location, but in the case of the Encantadas, it seems that documented short-term proximity will do. These three individuals are named because they explored, circled, and poached upon the isles; notice how Melville makes deliberate mention of their “tortoise-hunting” practices. While we typically think of the association between person and place in a positive light with its potential to generate a sense of belonging or anchoring a home in a chaotic world, Melville resists positive affect in his narrative. The Buccaneer, whaler, and captain are all essentially pirates pilfering the resources of the isles.

This may be why Melville calls the association “peculiar.” “Peculiarly associated” suggests a bizarre connection between the Essex and the isles, but the root of this term has more telling connotations. The referent to peculiarity may point to the randomness of the association, suggesting that such relations with place are not always motivated, refuting ideas like Manifest Destiny. In addition to denoting an apparent strangeness in the association, “peculiar” also refers to the particular and exclusive characteristics of a person, group, or place. For example, one might say the Galapagos tortoise is “peculiar” to the Enchanted Isles, because it cannot be found anywhere else.
Although the history of repeating the stories of the *Essex* and the isles may have made it seem like the ship is native to the isles, this is also not true, because the ship is not of them. In fact, the *Essex*’s relation to the isles was generated from the War of 1812, as the ship’s mission was to fight off British fleets in the Pacific for the American cause.\(^{18}\) Hence the peculiarity of the association between the *Essex* and the isles may be Melville’s way of suggesting that the *Essex* is not native or particular to the isles at all, but rather has a strange historically built association with the isles that is not natural but forced. Combining the two connotations behind the word “peculiar” suggests that the association between the *Essex* and the Encantadas is an example of the strangeness behind belonging to place, or the often bizarre and unusual ways that persons or things come to be connected and metonymically representative of place, many of which are imperial acts of domination.

The authors Tarnmoor has chosen are referred to as being “eye-witnesses” and “authorities” on the isles. What makes one an “eye-witness” and “authority” of a given place? What does the eye really witness? Melville illustrates the questionable nature of vision in the fifth sketch, when he describes the encounter between the U.S. *Essex* and a supposedly enchanted English whaling vessel. After practical destruction due to rough winds, the *Essex* survives only to proceed in pursuit of the other vessel, which it never catches. The pursued gets away by raising American flags and catching a strong wind to carry it off. The whale ship seems to be enchanted in nationality and in nature: “This

\(^{18}\) The Americans went to war with Britain because they disliked the restraints Britain placed on trade agreements and the impressment practices of the British Navy, who would find American sailors on the high seas and force them to become part of their Navy.
enigmatic craft – American in the morning, and English in the evening – her sails full of wind in a calm – was never again beheld. An enchanted ship no doubt. So, at least, the sailors swore” (95). This is an example of an eye-witness account, as the “sailors swear” to what they have witnessed, but the reality of the scene is destabilized by the enchanting quality of the flyaway ship. Its fleeting nationality and capacity to catch non-existent winds seem like fiction, but there are none to contradict the story, as the sailors are the only “authorities” of the scene. This again suggests the peculiarity of place narratives, as the authorities on the isles seem questionable.

In the final sentence of the passage, Tarnmoor explains his basis for excluding other historical sources on the Enchanted Isles. The “barren, bootless allusions” of “passing voyagers or compilers” is what he leaves out of the text. The difference between these and the works of Cowley, Colnett, and Porter is one of focus. The latter group approaches the Encantadas as their primary focus, while passing voyagers make empty and useless “allusions” to the isles. An allusion is unilateral, always pointing toward something else. It does not work reciprocally like metonymy does. Hence, Melville is saying that these writers only allude to the isles although their main topics are elsewhere. While their works may point toward the Encantadas, the isles do not point back to them. This two-way or peculiar association is the central difference between metonymy and allusion: the former works in two directions, while the latter only points outward. For example, Tarnmoor makes allusions to Spencer’s *The Faerie Queen* in the epigraphs of several sketches, and while the essence of “The Encantadas” can point toward Spencer’s text, *The Faerie Queen* does not point back to the Encantadas. While
each individual sketch begins with an allusion, the essence of each individual sketch is metonymy: the long-term association between a particular person or thing with an individual isle, feature of the isles, or the isles collectively. Like the Spencerian allusions that do not point back to the Galapagos, when read as an allegory of nationalism, the text directs outward rather than inward. Because allegory is not reciprocal like metonymy and, furthermore, because this allegory is only partial, Melville maintains the integrity of the isles without obscuring them under the veil of nationalism, keeping the reader loosely in place.

In addition to undercutting the national allegory, Melville also directly undermines the scientific approach to nature. This is most evident in the chart in the fourth sketch, where the narrator tries to give statistics on Albemarle Isle, deriding Darwin’s method of categorization. It includes numbers on various animals but also includes such interesting categories as “Man-haters” and “Devils,” both of which the isle has in “unknown” amounts. He concludes the chart by adding up the total population and states: “Making a clean total of 11,000,000 exclusive of an incomputable host of fiends, ant-eaters, man-haters, and salamanders” (90). Not only does he mock science’s methods of categorization here, but he also contaminates the supposedly pure categories of nature with culture by including devils and man-haters in his biological list. Not only are “fiends” deemed “incomputable,” but so also are salamanders. While a salamander may be easier to identify than a fiend, the abundant salamanders are not necessarily easy to count. Melville scoffs at the idea of estimation in science and the way it is often taken for truth, when in reality an estimate is simply a good guess. Cowan writes, “Science
abstracts the event from its particularity only in order to fold it back into an immanent framework that will make it determinable and, ideally, predeterminable. It opposes allegory in refusing to posit a disjunction between the immanent realm of events and the transcendent realm where meaning, or ‘true being’ exists” (94). Science and overindulgent mapping can lead to a problematic determinism. Cowan suggests that allegory requires a “disjunction between the immanent realm of events and the transcendent realm” while science refuses this gap. Melville’s inverted allegory generates a gap between the materiality of the islands and the cultural inflections that imagine them, a gap that leaves room for some idea of nature outside the hand of nationalism. It also allows for both nature and culture to exist and interact, without one obliterating the other.

V. Uncivilizing the Civilized

Just as Melville disrupts the determinism of science, he also dismantles the distinction between humans and animals. Contradictions run rampant in this novella: in addition to the question of whether the islands are stable or fleeting, one chain or two, the descriptions of the characters and the wildlife that inhabit the islands do not adhere to convention. The individuals who live on the islands, like Oberlus and the Dog-King, lack “humanity,” whereas the dogs on the islands are deemed “aristocratic” and the native tortoises look like roman coliseums, making the animals appear more civilized than the humans. For example, when the Dog-King tries to civilize Charles’s Isle, he brings 80 people to populate the island and a pack of dogs to act as his own personal army. As crime becomes rampant in this newly formed community, the King appoints a group of
men to act as his private army, but the human regiment is actually subordinate to the dog army. The population starts to dwindle because the regular riffraff of the island are “downright plotters and malignant traitors,” whom the King enjoys exterminating. Eventually the King has to abolish the death penalty and disband his private human army to maintain the community: “The human part of the lifeguard was now disbanded, and set to work cultivating the soil, and raising potatoes; the regular army now solely consisting of the dog-regiment” (102). Through allocating characteristics of “humanity” and “civilization” to those not supposed to bear those qualities, dogs and tortoises, Melville suggests that the differences between animalism and civilization are also arbitrary.

The army’s demotion to the status of field hands should not be overlooked. It demonstrates, first of all, that no community can flourish without working with their environment in order to survive, but it also shows how “civilization” creates a hierarchy with those working closest to nature on the bottom of the social scale. The role of the field worker is clearly a reference to slavery and points out both America’s dependence on natural resources and the desire to rise above that dependence.

Indeed, the American pastoral landscape may have symbolized the “nation” in antebellum literature, but while the American landscape was valorized as an image of freedom, slavery provided the background and backbone of that freedom. Slaves became synonymous with nature and were thereby degraded to the outskirts of a “civilized” populace. Slavery relies on a demarcation between “civilized” and “uncivilized” persons. “Civilization” typically refers to “a developed or advanced state of human society” (OED), one which is “still contrasted with savagery or barbarism” (Williams, Keywords
However, the root of the word, “civil,” also connotes citizenship, or the idea of belonging to a community of citizens (OED). Therefore, a civilized society is one that has supposedly overcome savagery or the “baseness” of nature. Overcoming nature in “The Encantadas” proves to be impossible, and those who wish to elevate their status end up doing so by creating hierarchies, with land workers on the bottom of the social scale. At the root of slavery, however, is anthropocentrism; the natural is positioned in opposition to the civilized, suggesting that nature and culture are separate spheres and that culture always has the upper hand. Developing a “civilized” nation, therefore, requires a disassociation from the natural in its citizens. In *Regeneration Through Violence*, Richard Slotkin articulates the need for early American colonists to separate themselves from their European ancestors and from the Native American tribes they found in the continent: “the colonists’ [had their] own need to affirm – for themselves and for the home folks – that they had not deserted European civilization for American savagery” (15). Hence, while the natural was valorized as a symbol of national identity, the citizenry needed to avoid becoming too “natural.”

While such distinctions between the civilized and the uncivilized justified the removal and decimation of Native American tribes in the new world and the enslavement of Africans and their offspring, Melville refuses to evacuate nature from the so-called “civilized” colonizers on the islands. In his ninth sketch about the hermit Oberlus, Melville reverses the idea of “whiteness,” which traditionally symbolizes purity and goodness. The narrator describes Oberlus as “beastlike,” “a wild white creature…in the person of a European bringing into this savage region qualities more diabolical than are
to be found among any of the surrounding cannibals” (122). Here, Oberlus the “wild white creature” is not associated with goodness, but rather with evil. He resorts to slavery and is a misanthrope of the worst kind. While Melville describes Oberlus as “beastlike,” he does not equate his evil behavior with nature. Melville writes, “Indeed, the sole superiority of Oberlus over the tortoises was his possession of a larger capacity of degradation” (124). Here, Oberlus “civilizes” Hood’s isle not by conducting an elevated way of life, but rather by being more evil than the animals.

Melville describes his malevolent demeanor in relation to the way he farms the soil: “When planting, his whole aspect and all his gestures were so malevolently and uselessly sinister and secret, that he seemed rather in the act of dropping poison into wells than potatoes into soil” (123-4). Eventually like the Dog-King, Oberlus passes the farming onto his slaves, in this case a few unfortunate sailors who have been trapped on the island by the misanthrope. Oberlus deceives sailors that are passing through the isles by befriending them, getting them intoxicated, and then tying them up and trapping them on the island. Unable to locate the sailors, the ships leave them behind, fearing Oberlus (and his blunderbuss) and leaving the men dependent on their master because they cannot escape the island, nor can they survive the interior of the island on their own. Oberlus puts his slaves to work on the land, “breaking the caked soil; transporting upon their backs loads of loamy earth” (128). He forces his slaves to work the land, creating distance between himself and nature and allowing Oberlus to imagine himself superior to all that surrounds him. Oberlus’s hierarchy fails in the end, and Melville casts his “civilizing ” methods as uncivilized.
Melville ends the sketch, however, with sympathy for the wretch Oberlus. After his arrest and jailing in Payta (South America), Melville writes, “And here, for a long time, Oberlus was seen…a creature whom it is religion to detest, since it is philanthropy to hate a misanthrope” (132). He points out the irony that even the most altruistic person has hate and anger for an evil character like Oberlus, questioning whether philanthropy should really be more valuable in society, when it also thrives off hatred and is blind to its own iniquity.

Melville’s repeated references to the tortoises on the isles show a similar duality. In his second sketch titled “Two Sides to a Tortoise,” Melville writes, “yet even the tortoise, dark and melancholy as it is upon the back, still possesses a bright side; its calipee or breast-plate being sometimes of a faint yellowish or golden tinge” (75). The narrator explains that when one turns a tortoise on its back it exposes the bright side, but after doing this the tortoise gets stuck and cannot turn itself back over (75). In this manner, he illustrates how easy it is to get consumed with one side and forget the other. The narrator warns: “Enjoy the bright, keep it turned up perpetually if you can, but be honest, and don’t deny the black” (76). This symbol suggests not only our inability to see two sides of a tortoise, but also the two sides to nature and humanity in general. Thus Melville suggests that nature too can be evil or benevolent, and one must never forget that it is both.

While Melville criticizes our perception of humanity as somehow being more “humane” and superior to nature, he is also careful not to uphold nature as a pristine entity. He derides the Transcendentalists for their one-sided view of nature. In the sixth
sketch, the Buccaneers of Barrington Isle participate in a “fellowship with nature” (98). Along with this, however, the Buccaneers are also thieves and murderers: “they robbed and murdered one day, revelled the next, and rested themselves by turning meditative philosophers, rural poets, and seat-builders on the third” (99). Here Melville argues that forming a communion with nature should not necessarily be held up as a virtue either. In this particular case, the Buccaneers’ connection to nature does not translate into a communion with other human beings. This, unsurprisingly, contradicts the point Melville put forth with Oberlus, where he implies that dominating nature translates into lofty ideas of social superiority. Melville’s mode of contradiction once again obscures the dominant ideological values attributed to nature and humanity, and by stripping nature of these connotations he puts forth an idea of the environment that is not completely subordinate to culture. The text imagines an environment that is not predictable and exists outside of the “nation.”

Melville also does not suggest that nature is pure and unaffected by culture. The narrator tells how he sometimes has “optical delusions” about the Encantadas and has visions of “the ghost of a gigantic tortoise, with ‘Memento *****’ burning in live letters upon his back,” crawling across the floor (74). The writing is the mark of humanity on nature, burned into the back of the tortoise. But the fact that the tortoise haunts the dreams and memories of the narrator suggests that nature has also made its mark on him, and the symbol of the tortoise with burning letters becomes emblematic of both the effect culture has on nature and nature has on culture. Melville does not make the markings all readable, which is part of the reason the vision is so evocative. The word we do
comprehend is “Memento,” suggesting that the tortoise represents a kind of keepsake, but
one that cannot be fully interpreted. The memento of the tortoise is of course the warning
the narrator made earlier, when he says regarding the tortoises: “don’t deny the black.”
However, the entire message on the tortoise’s back is unreadable, suggesting that we
continually try to interpret nature, but we will never be able to fully comprehend our
environment. We try to “read” nature, but Melville points out that we cannot always read
the signs, and the signs might not be signs at all.  

While the dominant organizational device that holds the novella together is its
setting, the reader never gets a complete view of the isles. In general, the ten sketches
begin with a few broad descriptions of the Encantadas, and then they zoom in, going
from island to island. Even from the top of Rock Rodondo, which is supposed to enable
a “pisgah view” of the isles, one can see only some of the enchanted isles (91-2). Nor
does the reader get to visit every island in the Galapagos chain. The narrative circles
around the islands and along the coasts but never goes into the interiors of any of the
islands until the very end of the narrative.

The interiors of the isles are the most mysterious of places in this enchanting and
ambiguous text. The interiors are a hiding place for those, like Oberlus and the Dog-
King, who try to avoid persecution and banishment from the islands, but Tarnmoor does
not take the reader inside the isles on either of these occasions. There are only two

19 As a symbol, interpretations of the tortoise proliferate. R. Bruce Bickley argues: “The final and most
important motif in the sketches is the symbol of the tortoise. This reptile is the central force for resolving
the major tensions in the sketches: those between degradation and triumph, between life and death, and
between the real and the supernatural. With the tortoise, ‘The Encantadas’ synthesize as art and as
philosophy” (118). For Bickley the tortoise resolves these tensions because the tortoise is grander and
more ancient than any meaning Melville can infuse it with. Along these lines, some read the tortoise as a
kind of memento mori, reminding the reader of what he will never be able to avoid – death.
moments where Melville allows such a journey; the first is when the narrator spies on Hunilla at the grave she made for her husband; the last is the very ending of the novella, where the narrator takes the reader inside an island and finds a grave marked by a doggerel poem on a grave stone.

These rare glimpses into the inside of the islands reveal the same thing: death. Even early on in the novella, the narrator describes the isles as being fixed in the “very body of cadaverous death.” Obviously this refers to the ocean that surrounds the islands, for Melville was well aware of the ocean’s capacity to destroy human life, which he demonstrates in Hunilla’s story in sketch eight, when her husband and brother die in the sea. The ocean is a great killer and a tomb to many (especially sailors and slaves). Melville’s play on bodies is quite interesting here, calling the ocean a body itself and describing not death in general but a “cadaverous” death or death of the body. Hence, the ocean is a body where cadavers go to die, where the body is consumed and decomposed. The narrator comments that whenever possible ocean vessels try to bury their dead on land, and because of this, the Encantadas are “a convenient Potter’s Field,” or a home for the homeless, as the isles become the final resting place for the many outcasts of the world (136). Of course the assimilation into this home is marred by death; it is not a home in its traditional sense, which connotes a sense of belonging between person and place. The text ends with an inscription on a grave: “No more I peep out of my blinkers, / Here I be – tucked in with clinkers!” (137). Clinkers are the remains of burned coal or lava and once again, like the cadaverous ocean, the island consumes this body. This not only emphasizes the inevitability of death, but the focus on decomposing bodies
(cadaverous death) reinforces the materiality of human existence and how we are inescapably part of nature. Whether one’s body is marked as civilized or uncivilized, citizen or slave, all bodies will return to the environment. As Terry Eagleton writes, “nature has the final victory over culture, customarily known as death….Death is the limit of discourse, not a product of it” (87). Indeed, death as the limit of discourse, is relevant to the reading of the tortoise and to reading the entirety of the text.

“The Encantadas” ends much as it began; the islands remain uninhabitable, and while there are remnants of humanity in their mists, no community ever takes hold. Melville suggests that strict lines between nature and culture are arbitrary and incomplete. Place naming, mapping, generating a national allegory, and engaging theories of “civilization” are all necessary to nation formation. Melville subverts these methods by inverting the allegory, uncivilizing the “civilized,” and dislocating location. He reveals the peculiar associations between nationalism and place, associations that are forced rather than natural. While Melville represents nature as an element that can subvert nationalism, he also undermines much of the romantic and positive value typically associated with nature. Perceiving the environment as a purely benevolent entity, or as synonymous with the nation creates a problematic view of the environment. While there seems to be an anthropocentric element in any representation of nature in literature, at the very least we can say that not all representations say the same thing. Melville severs nature from the nation but also brings nature and humanity closer together. In this text nature disrupts nation formation and refuses to let civilization take shape, suggesting that there is nothing natural about Manifest Destiny. Melville
represents this by inverting the allegory of nation formation in order to represent the
tension between nationalism and environment. Through troubling the imaginary
boundaries between nature and culture, Melville counters the anthropocentrism inherent
in national production, because he allows nature to exist and act inside and, more
importantly, *outside* of the nation.
CHAPTER TWO

“THE VERY OAK TREES WILL NOT KNOW THEM APART”:

RACE AND ENVIRONMENT IN MARGARET FULLER

AND HENRY DAVID THOREAU

Margaret Fuller’s travelogue *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* reveals profound anxiety over the transformation of the landscape in the presence of mass immigration. In particular, Fuller questions how the environment and the nation will respond to the displacement of Native Americans and the influx of immigrants into the Midwest. *Summer* depicts immigrant settlers as unclean and motivated by the basest material desires; Fuller suggests that the way these settlers inhabit the landscape threatens to “obliterate the natural expression of the country,” and this obliteration is measured according to the metric of vanishing Native Americans (29). In other words, as Fuller conflates the American landscape with a pure national identity, the immigrant body is often pictured as a pollutant, like a disease or pest that contaminates and alters the environment it inhabits. While industrialization has typically been put forth as the primary culprit of environmental destruction in the nineteenth century, Fuller’s text presents another adversary.\(^2\) Fuller depicts an American environment that is threatened

\(^2\) Leo Marx’s benchmark text *The Machine in the Garden* uncovers the way industrialization disrupts images of the pristine landscape in nineteenth-century American literature. While this argument is insightful, at times critics follow too stringently in Marx’s wake, ignoring the way race also comes into
not simply by industrialization or capitalism, but by immigration and Native American displacement. By shifting the gaze from Fuller’s social activism to an ecocritical perspective focused on nature, I argue that Fuller depicts an environment endangered by miscegenation. As “undesirable” races mix with “Americans,” the threat of spoiling a pure American identity is figured as the impending contamination of a pristine landscape and the potential loss of authenticity in both its individual and national constructions.

Fuller suggests that nature will not remain static as its inhabitants change. Regarding new immigrants in the West, Fuller remarks, “Soon, soon their tales of the origin of things, and the Providence which rules them, will be so mingled with those of the Indian, that the very oak trees will not know them apart, – will not know whether itself be a Runic, a Druid, or a Winnebago oak” (102). What does it mean to say that trees will become blind to difference located in bodies? Why would this blindness result in a tree’s loss of identity? Does a tree have an identity? and finally why is Fuller suggesting that a tree can “know” difference and “know” itself? Fuller suggests a metonymic relationship between the trees and Native Americans in this passage. The trees signify Native American culture because of their long term proximity with the

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Largely influenced by Margaret Fuller’s other works like Woman in the Nineteenth Century, critics usually focus on Fuller’s social activism when interpreting Summer on the Lakes, in 1843. For example, Carmen Birkle’s “Travelogues of Independence: Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau” argues that Fuller’s Summer on the Lakes helped solidify Fuller’s political agenda concerning women’s rights after her experience with Native Americans and nature in the Midwest. More recently, Lance Newman’s “Margaret Fuller’s Summer on the Lakes, in 1843 and the Condition of America” contends that Summer displays the tension between a transcendent landscape and an American materialism that threatens nature, suggesting the text is really a critique of capitalism. While these arguments present an important side of Fuller’s work, they are one-sided in concordance with a pre-established vision of Margaret Fuller as cultural critic, and they tend to ignore the deep ambivalence that abounds in this text.
natives. This relationship over time has made the use of trees to represent Native American origins seem justified, when really the relationship is arbitrary: trees do not “know” origins. Instead of differentiating oaks by species, as scientific and metaphoric classification does, she suggests that these oaks can shift identity in the way metonymic association is made and remade. As new immigrants disrupt the proximity between the natives and the trees however, Fuller questions what will rise up in place of this old metonymy.

If the trees cannot identify their inhabitants and they cannot recognize themselves, then the trees seem to be having a complete identity crisis, and the trees’ loss of identity can be seen as a figurative representation of America’s loss of identity. If origins become so mixed that we no longer know our own origins, who are we? What are we? This expunction of identity/origin is what Fuller fears most. To combat this, she desires the Native American, metonymic relation to nature; a relationship based on contiguity, requiring a proximate relationship between person and space built over time. This association is particular, not general: it cannot simply be uprooted or transferred, which means that immigrants cannot merely be swapped into the old metonymic relation to the trees that the natives had. Since the Native American relation to nature represents a trinity of ideal purity for Fuller (pure in race, landscape, and in the metonymic balance that yields belonging to place), all of these configurations are about to be lost. In contrast, the new immigrant connection to nature does not generate a sense of belonging by dwelling proximate to the trees, but rather the immigrant connects to the trees by using them: clearing forests for the purchase and sale of lumber, building houses, etc. Fuller
suggests that the new inhabitants value the trees for their commercial value, not for their “tales of the origins of things.” In this way, the immigrant approach to nature is not only used to figure the potential cultural damage of losing an authentic American identity, but it also reflects the potential material damage inflicted upon nature by those that only see its value in dollar signs. In other words, Fuller both conflates nature with culture and attempts to separate nature from culture. She conflates nature with national identity but suggests nature has a value separate from humanity (a preservationist view) when she rebuffs the commercialization of nature. This chapter will analyze how Fuller puts forward a potential preservationist vision, but she falls short of fully achieving this vision.

While Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau were both against the commercialization of nature, their depictions of the American environment in *Summer on the Lakes, in 1843* and *Walden* display very different philosophies about nature. Both revere nature’s capacity to communicate the divine in the mundane. They also cherish nature’s ability to harbor the authentic, providing a place where one can discover true genius. Authenticity signifies an original experience of the self that comes from the inside, rather than an imitation of cultural influences motivated from disingenuous sources, like society. While Transcendentalists were always searching to connect with the American landscape, few critics have mentioned how race complicates this sense of belonging. The figure of the indigene and the immigrant disrupt the authentic experience of nature in Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes*, generating a vision of nature that differs from
Thoreau’s. Fuller’s text suggests that nature is a fragile entity facing devastating losses at the hands of humanity, while Thoreau’s *Walden* describes nature as an ever resilient being, that no human could ever destroy. While Fuller and Thoreau’s ideas about nature seem to exist in the world of the literary imagination, they have contributed to an ideology that affects our behavior toward the environment today. By comparing Fuller’s travelogue to Thoreau’s canonical text, I hope to show Fuller’s vision of a vulnerable American landscape in need of preservation, but her motives for preservation problematically define nature as a site of purity, resulting in a view that the environment is passive and in a state of perpetual loss, as the racialized body threatens to destroy the “purity” of the American landscape. Thus recovering Fuller’s early preservationist approach risks adopting her racial ideology, and for this reason, I do not seek to recover her approach to the environment, but instead attempt to place it within a larger context, hoping that it will illuminate the traffic that runs between nature and culture.23

I. Fuller’s Nature

Fuller’s text puts forth an early concept of environmental preservationism that conflates environmental purity with national purity, as the text searches for a landscape and its inhabitants to fulfill a preconceived vision of the West influenced by Transcendentalism. Preservationism is most easily identified as a movement from the early twentieth century, when John Muir and Gifford Pinchot created slightly different

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22 While there is debate over why the indigene and the immigrant disrupt Fuller’s vision of nature, critics like Christina Zwarg do concur that such disruptions take place (“Footnoting the Sublime: Margaret Fuller on Black Hawk’s Trail,” 618).

23 This phrase comes from Donna Haraway’s *Primate Visions*, which refers to the “traffic between what we have come to know historically as nature and culture” (15).
approaches to environmental management. Gifford Pinchot’s conservationism was a utilitarian approach to nature, which sought to maximize the use value of the American landscape, particularly in regards to forestry practices, mining, and grazing. Preservationists like Muir, on the other hand, believed that nature had a value in itself, suggesting that the environment should be protected for its intrinsic value, not for the material resources it yields. The difference between the two approaches is not always easy to identify, as the two forms of environmentalism often intersect. But while Muir made preservationism popular in the early twentieth century, it is clear that this mode of thinking began much earlier, as evident in Margaret Fuller’s *Summer on the Lakes*.

Fuller’s preservationism is apparent in the way she ridicules those who approach nature from a utilitarian perspective. In the opening chapter of *Summer on the Lakes*, during her visit to Niagara Falls, she witnesses a spectator spit into the cataract. She writes, “He walked close up to the fall, and, after looking at it a moment, with an air as if thinking how he could best appropriate it to his own use, he spat into it” (5). Niagara Falls is supposed to be an ideal location for the Transcendentalist, as its awesome features were renowned and sure to evoke the sublime. As Fuller watches this man spit into the natural wonder, she seems horrified by his audacity. Fuller remarks,

>This trait seemed wholly worthy of an age whose love of utility is such that the Prince Pucler Muskau suggests the probability of men coming to put the bodies of their dead parents in the fields to fertilize them and of a country such as Dickens has described; but these will not, I hope, be seen on the historic page to be truly the age or truly the America. (5)

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24 For a good explanation of the difference between Muir and Pinchot refer to Roderick Nash’s chapter entitled “John Muir: Publicizer” in *Wilderness and the American Mind*. 
Here Fuller mockingly suggests that America is so obsessed with material wants that individuals value the crops in the field over their own parents, suggesting a complete lack of emotional attachment, as the dead are not mourned, but instead become fertilizer that is valuable only because it makes the fields more profitable. This passage conveys her fear that materialism is corrupting the nation, and to illustrate that debasement Fuller evokes images of Dickens’ dreary London cityscapes. She also calls the problem a “trait” of the age, suggesting that it is part of the essential character of this generation.

To combat this mode of degradation, *Summer on the Lakes* attempts to capture or *preserve* the purity of the landscape throughout the text, evident in moments when Fuller captures the sublime. For example, after her disappointment viewing Niagara Falls, Fuller explores a lesser-known section of Niagara, walking the bridge to Goat Island. Here she documents her experience: “All tended to harmonize with the natural grandeur of the scene. I gazed long. I saw how here mutability and unchangeableness were united” (9). In this typical Transcendental and sublime vision, Fuller shows how the natural scenery evokes ideas about the universe at large. The particularity of Goat Island fades as abstract ideas regarding the connection between “mutability and unchangeableness” abound.

However, in contrast with these sublime moments, the text also displays moments of disruption, as the beauty of the landscape is disturbed by immigrant settlers and displaced Native Americans. In fact, Fuller is so troubled by those who dwell in the Midwest that her motivation to preserve the landscape becomes suspect. Does she advocate preservationism because she sees nature as truly having a value in itself (Muir’s
preservationism), or is she preserving a national ideal of purity that supposedly originates in nature? The nation values nature as part of its collective American identity, and most critics agree that the pristine landscape enabled nationalism. In *The Machine in the Garden*, Leo Marx argues, “The pastoral ideal has been used to define the meaning of America ever since the age of discovery, and it has not yet lost its hold upon the native imagination” (3). While European nations could build their identities out of history, America’s lack of history provoked a turn to nature. America built its identity out of the physicality of the land, out of space rather than time. Myra Jehlen writes, “When the liberal ideal fused with the material landscape, it produced an ‘America’ that was not allegory, for its meaning was not detachable, but symbol, its meaning inherent in its matter” (9). *Summer on the Lakes*, however, represents the moment after discovery, when immigrants settle the land; the moment where American history is beginning. But since the Midwestern immigrant does not have a history with the nation, he/she must build his/her national identity out of nature. Such production is constructed both metaphorically and metonymically; America is nature’s nation (metaphor), but one must live within the nation’s borders in order to become American (metonymy). The crisis, for Fuller, is that the immigrants themselves are displaced persons. They may even hold metonymic relationships to their homelands, and if this is the case, what figurative baggage do they bring with them to the new nation? As the old origins mix with a new American essence harbored in nature, a new identity emerges and the landscape changes, as all that was original and pure in nature is lost.
While the landscape facilitated nationalism, nature has also been a source of condescension for Americans when we ponder the line between the natural and the human. Oppression often functions according to an imaginary line drawn between “civilized” and “uncivilized.” Those deemed as “natural” are considered uncultivated and therefore not eligible to participate in an ideal citizenry. Hence, American culture contains an inherent contradiction: we both covet and despise nature, depending on where it lies. According to this paradigm, environments should be natural emblems of the nation, while the citizenry should be highly cultured opposed to natural, but these seemingly “pure” categories severing nature from culture are false for both the environment and its inhabitants.

These ambivalent feelings about nature are evident in Margaret Fuller’s writings about Native Americans and immigrants in the Midwest, toward whom her feelings vacillate between compassion and disgust. Ironically, this text is part elegy over the “loss” of Native Americans and part affirmation of Manifest Destiny. In a similar manner, when it comes to the new immigrants who are populating the Great Lakes region, at times she sympathizes with their lot, while at other moments she criticizes them relentlessly. For example, in regards to the flood of immigration and rapid development of the landscape, Fuller writes, “Thus, I will not grieve that all the noble trees are gone already from this island to feed this caldron, but believe it will have Medea’s virtue, and reproduce them in the form of new intellectual growths, since centuries cannot again adorn the land with such” (18). This passage displays optimism over the way the nation is taking shape. Here, Fuller purports that the environmental destruction occurring in the
West will hopefully be recycled into promising “intellectual growths” in the region, similar to the Greek myth in which Medea transforms an old ram into a young one after cutting it up and boiling it in a cauldron. However, this optimism wavers throughout the text, and sometimes Fuller suggests the opposite, and even her reference to Medea has a dark undercurrent, for Medea’s act of rebirth was also an act of death. Medea’s transformation of the ram was used to trick Pelias’s daughters into killing their father. Hence, Fuller’s reference to Medea again displays ambivalence, as she suggests that immigrants will bring something new to America, but they are also destroying parts of the environment that are irreplaceable, “since centuries cannot again adorn the land with such [trees].” This negative view of immigration continues, when Fuller notes, “But they [immigrant women] have a great deal to war with in the habits of thought acquired by their mothers from their own early life. Everywhere the fatal spirit of imitation, of reference to European standards, penetrates, and threatens to blight whatever of original growth might adorn the soil” (39). Clearly Fuller’s optimism has vanished here, as immigrants bring an intellect with them that jeopardizes the “authentic” nature of America.

While many critics ignore the cynical side of Fuller’s work in favor of her more liberal side, the ambivalence of the text has been a source of interest amongst some Fuller scholars. Christina Zwarg argues that in *Summer on the Lakes* Fuller uses “shifts in frames of reference” because this was Fuller’s “best strategy” to explore the tension between dominant and marginal points of view (635). Expounding on Zwarg’s argument, Fritz Fleischmann suggests that Fuller’s fluctuation between alternative views is her
method of cultural critique. In the same vein, Cheryl Fish states, “In almost all of her writing…Fuller uses the format of dialogue to work out her own ambivalence and to show the relations among subjects, including points of view that are other than the opinion she holds, a method which breaks down the dualistic paradigm she struggles to overcome” (qtd. in Fleishman 17). While these critics seem to have reached a relative consensus, I am not convinced that Fuller’s method of alternating perspectives ever reaches any conclusions. Rather, the ambivalence in the text reveals Fuller’s anxiety over the future of America, and as Mary Douglas explains in Purity and Danger, “Ambiguous things can seem very threatening” (preface xi). Hence, Fuller’s representations of immigrants and Native Americans border between racism and compassion. She considers both Native Americans and European immigrants as “other,” because neither group “belongs” to America; Native Americans do not belong to the nation because of their race, even though they metonymically belong to the landscape, and immigrants may belong racially, but do not belong metonymically. She envisions the Native American other as a victim that will fall at the hands of destiny and the European immigrant as an agent degenerating a new Eden. It is critical to note, however, that the other’s potential victimhood or agency is very much linked to Fuller’s ideas about the environment. In other words, while Summer contains ambivalent representations of both immigrants and Native Americans, when it comes to the relationship between these groups and nature, their roles are strictly cast. In this case, Native Americans play the role of the victim and immigrants are cast as dangerous agents according to both ethnic groups’ contingency to nature. Immigrants are figured as the agents that spoil and
mistreat the landscape and thereby displace the Native Americans who were originally part of that environment. Fuller bypasses the fact that U.S. policies were really what displaced Native Americans from their homes. Hence, the text contains ambivalent representations of Native Americans and immigrants, until it comes to their interactions with nature.

In order to understand how a woman with a liberal agenda could sympathize and condemn a racialized other, I must first explain Fuller’s preconceived vision of nature that she brings to the Midwest. Fuller renders nature as the site of purity and transcendental potential, denoting nature as a place where one can connect (or transcend) and reach the divine. Clearly Fuller’s concept of nature was influenced by her transcendental roots. The search for authenticity is evident throughout *Summer on the Lakes*, as it is in transcendental philosophy at large. In the beginning of the text, Fuller’s experience at Niagara Falls is skewed because it is mediated by everything that she has read and the visual representations she has seen prior to arriving at the falls. She writes, “When I first came I felt nothing but a quiet satisfaction. I found that drawings, the panorama, &c. had given me a clear notion of the position and proportions of all objects here; I knew where to look for everything, and everything looked as I thought it would” (4). In fact she claims that these forms of mediation actually inhibit her from experiencing the sublime. Ironically, here she argues that artistic representations of Niagara hinder her from experiencing an authentic moment with the cataract, but later she will go on to suggest that art can preserve Native American authenticity. Toward the end of the chapter she writes, “Happy were the first discoverers of Niagara, those who could
come unawares upon this view and upon that, whose feeling[s] were entirely their own” (9). This is Fuller’s primary desire throughout the text: to achieve authentic experience.

By “authentic” I mean a kind of revelation about the self that is new, that comes from within, rather than one that is recycled from without. In Nature, Emerson states that Americans are stuck in the past and must look for “an original relation to the universe” (27). He writes, “Embosomed for a season in nature, whose floods of life stream around and through us, and invite us by the powers they supply, to action proportioned to nature, why should we grope among the dry bones of the past” (27). Authenticity in Transcendentalism can perhaps best be understood through their esteemed concepts of talent and genius. Most critics agree that concocting a solidified explanation of transcendental dogma is no easy task, because it was not unified in many respects. However, the favoring of intuition over reason in this philosophy was a common trope, and with this came the endorsement of authenticity. As Joel Myerson explains, “With this reliance on intuition came the concomitant expression of organicism (form follows function, not just in art but also in life) and choice of genius (originality) over talent (mere replications of inspired originals)” (xxix-xxx). In other words, talent was not nearly as favored as genius in transcendental thought because talent involved a learned skill, while genius displayed innate skill. One’s innate skill, however, may not be immediately apparent; hence, experience in nature could lead to this discovery. In “The American Scholar” Emerson writes, “And, in fine, the ancient precept, ‘Know thyself,’ and the modern precept, ‘Study nature,’ become at last one maxim” (58). Because Transcendentalism sees the relationship between nature and the divine as synecdochal
(the macrocosm can be seen in the microcosm), experience in nature is a way of experiencing the divine, and through this experience one can discern one’s own authentic being (or genius). Hence, this “original relation to the universe” is “embosomed” in nature, but while Margaret Fuller seeks authenticity, her experiences in the wild lands of the Midwest fail to yield this sensation.

In this way, Fuller is more interested in the feeling nature can generate than the physical features of an environment. For example, early on in her journey through the great lakes, Fuller writes, “But it was not so soon that I learned to appreciate the lake scenery; it was only after a daily and careless familiarity that I entered into its beauty, for nature always refuses to be seen by being stared at” (17). This reveals one of nature’s most important traits for Fuller: beauty. She also suggests that the beauty of nature can only be accessed through extended experience with it; one does not comprehend such beauty by “staring” at nature or studying it like a scientist. Fuller’s recipe for uncovering nature is familiarity without focus; one can generate an appreciation of nature only through an effortless immersion. This “daily and careless familiarity” she refers to sounds like home – a place one knows through repeated experiences with it, rather than

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25 Another example of this is in Emerson’s “Experience,” where he writes, “...there is victory yet for all justice; and the true romance which the world exists to realize, will be the transformation of genius into practical power” (“Experience,” 213).

26 Beauty is yet another Transcendental concept. Emerson explains in Nature, “The world thus exists to the soul to satisfy the desire of beauty. This element I call an ultimate end. No reason can be asked or given why the soul seeks beauty” (34). Again, beauty found in nature is another way of reaching the divine.

27 Emerson says something very similar in “Experience,” when he writes, “Nature does not like to be observed and likes that we should be her fools and playmates” (200).
through methodical study. Subsequently, in addition to the concept of beauty, Fuller attaches a sense of belonging to her understanding of nature.\textsuperscript{28}

II. Thoreau’s Nature - Belonging to Walden Pond

Because Fuller desires belonging but struggles to find it in the Midwest, it will be helpful to refer to fellow Transcendentalist Henry David Thoreau to see how he depicts this state, for one’s attachment to place can completely alter his or her understanding of the environment. Thoreau’s \textit{Walden} is a perfect depiction of what Fuller’s ideal sense of belonging would look like. He is attached to Walden in history and in practice, as he grew up coming to the pond and now lives off the land in his small shelter. Thoreau writes,

\begin{quote}
When I was four years old, as I well remember, I was brought from Boston to this my native town, through these very woods and this field, to the pond. It is one of the oldest scenes stamped on my memory…. Almost the same johnswort springs from the same perennial root in this pasture, and even I have at length helped to clothe that fabulous landscape of my infant dreams, and one of the results of my presence and influence is seen in these bean leaves, corn blades, and potato vines. (405)
\end{quote}

Thoreau paints a picture of complete immersion here, where he is “present” in the bean leaves, and Walden Pond is “stamped” in his memory. The construction of the Walden landscape in Thoreau’s memory is mutually constructed by nature and Thoreau: “even I have at length helped to clothe that fabulous landscape.” Of course, he has “clothed” the landscape not simply by generating it in his imagination, but also by planting the bean

\textsuperscript{28} What I refer to as “belonging” is sometimes referred to as “dwelling” by ecocritics. Greg Garrard, for example, uses the latter term to describe this feeling, which is also found in the Georgic tradition (\textit{Ecocriticism} 108-35). I have elected to use the term belonging instead, because I think it does a better job at connoting the true feeling of attachment to place found in Thoreau’s \textit{Walden} and lacking in Fuller’s \textit{Summer on the Lakes}. 
fields and physically altering the landscape. His reference to “clothing” is a very deliberate choice, referring to the beginning of Walden, where Thoreau lambastes the preoccupation culture has with fashion (276-82). In regards to the unnecessary obsession with being in style, Thoreau writes, “All men want, not something to do with [utility], but something to do, or rather something to be” (278). Hence, he manipulates the act of “clothing” here, as “clothing” his dreams and the landscape become an act of being – something that does not cover the self, but actually is part of the self. This sense of belonging that Thoreau feels toward Walden is generated by his proximity to this place established over time. Such a relationship is metonymic, which is evident in his claim that Walden is “his native town.”

In contrast, Fuller’s text never really achieves the sense of belonging that Thoreau finds in Walden. As Fuller suggests when she tries to sum up the travelogue: “What I got from the journey was the poetic impression of the country at large; it is all I have aimed to communicate” (42). The “poetic impression” that Fuller communicates falls short of Thoreau’s attachment to Walden Pond, where his “presence and influence” has become part of the landscape. Even after seeing Niagara Falls, Fuller writes, “Before coming away, I think I really saw the full wonder of the scene” (4). Those two little words “I think” convey her uncertainty with her statement, and it is somewhat doubtful if she ever “really” grasps the Falls. Even her statement that she “came away” from the scene demonstrates a difference from Thoreau, as he would not be able to come away from the landscape because he is part of it. Certainly, when one considers the overall structure of

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29 For more on the metonymic quality of Thoreau’s writing see Sharon Cameron’s Writing Nature.
Summer on the Lakes it appears that the text vacillates between descriptions of picturesque beauty and descriptions of Midwestern inhabitants. Hence, the text repeatedly addresses Native American displacement and the immigrant treatment of the landscape, and therefore the idea of reaching a true and individual state of belonging in this landscape is constantly disrupted by the socio-political issues of the time. As Fuller writes when leaving Illinois, “I have fixed my attention almost exclusively on the picturesque beauty of this region; it was so new, so inspiring. But I ought to have been more interested in the housekeeping of this magnificent state, in the education she is giving her children, in their prospects” (64-5). This is a perfect example of how Fuller waffles between the picturesque beauty of the landscape and her troubled feelings about those that inhabit this landscape; in this way, her attempt to connect with nature never gets beyond the picturesque, as her social conscience raises concerns over the way the nation is taking shape.

Yet another reason Fuller struggles to belong in the Midwest is because she is a tourist writing a travelogue, whereas Thoreau writes a sedentary text firmly rooted in place. Her relationship to this environment, as a working tourist, is based on commercial exchange: Fuller appropriates the landscape as it proves useful for her travelogue. She has discrete and sequential encounters, never losing herself so long as she is a mere consuming tourist. Such a metaphoric relationship, where the only parts of nature that are valuable are the ones that help sell and construct her text, runs against the metonymic contiguity between person and place seen in Thoreau and desired by Fuller. In other
words, even though Fuller desires a sensation of belonging with the Midwest, such a project runs counter to her position as tourist and travel writer.

Travel cannot generate belonging. In fact, Thoreau has an aversion to travel: “He who is only a traveler learns things at second-hand and by the halves, and is poor authority” (457). Thoreau acts like a Bioregionalist in his text, as he has no interest really in the outside world, condemning travel, railroads, and telegraph machines. He writes, “We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it may be, have nothing important to communicate” (307). Complying with his bioregionalist ethic, Thoreau expounds on all aspects of the local community, including its history, natural history, economy, and culture (McGinnis). He criticizes travel, claiming that people engage in it because it is fashionable, and they are looking for something that, in truth, they will never find.

For Fuller, tourism is not exactly the best avenue to belong to a place, as it is impossible to generate a “careless familiarity” when going from place to place. Fuller expounds on the desire to travel and the potential downfalls of such travel in the dialogue she writes between the “solitary old man” and the “young traveler” (48-9). In this passage the Traveler is searching for stability and permanency in the world. This is something that his travels have not helped him find, for he is “forth driven by insatiable desire” (48), and he is not quite sure what keeps compelling him on. The Old Man

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30 In Bioregionalism, Michael Vincent McGinnis suggests that Walden displays an early example of Bioregionalism (3), which today is a doctrine of environmentalism focused on the local community in all its formations, including a place’s environment, ecology, culture, history, spirituality, ideology, economy, etc. For other useful explanations of Bioregionalism see Kirkpatrick Sale’s Dwellers in the Land: the Bioregional Vision or Mike Carr’s Bioregionalism and Civil Society: Democratic Challenges to Corporate Globalism.
explains to the Traveler that all life is transient like a dream, and he is searching for a permanency that he will never find. This dialogue resembles the difference between Thoreau’s *Walden* and Fuller’s *Summer*, as Fuller is compelled to search for answers on her journey, but Thoreau suggests that travel will never yield such answers.

In addition to the sedentary ways of *Walden*, Thoreau also finds a deep sense of belonging there because he is not simply an observer of this place; rather he works the land and becomes a part of it. As Thoreau explains in his chapter “The Bean Fields,” “I came to love my rows, my beans, though so many more than I wanted. They attached me to the earth, and so I got strength like Antaeus” (404). The reader never finds this sensation of being “attached to the earth” in Fuller’s text. Thoreau suggests that the act of farming creates another level of belonging with the landscape. Of course, the romanticization of agrarian labor existed well before Thoreau. He invests in the georgic style, exemplified by Virgil’s *Georgics*, which promote farming as a way of restoring virtue to the people (Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, 108-13). Greg Garrard argues that Thoreau is playing with several traditional approaches to nature, including “pastoral, georgic, and the sublime” (“Wordsworth and Thoreau,” 194). However, it is his georgic elements, exemplified by the “Bean Fields” chapter, that best demonstrate his sense of belonging. As stated in the passage above, planting attaches him to the earth and makes him strong like Antaeus – a character from Greek mythology that was the son of Poseidon and Gaia (Mother Earth). According to the myth, Antaeus was strong when his feet were attached to the earth, but he lost that strength as soon as he lost touch with the earth (Apollodorus 82). With this reference, Thoreau draws upon the vast history of nature writing and
emphasizes his interest in the georgic tradition. There is a difference between observing nature and working with it, and Thoreau suggests that this kind of labor can yield a sensation of belonging, converting space to place.

Of course, there is a fine line between the agrarianism that Thoreau advocates and the form of agriculture that he abhors. He writes, “Ancient poetry and mythology suggest, at least, that husbandry was once a sacred art; but it is pursued with irreverent haste and heedlessness by us, our object being to have large farms and large crops merely” (414). Here Thoreau condemns the idea of farming for surplus, as he approaches agriculture not as a method of sustainability, but as an art. Like a sculptor, Thoreau makes “the yellow soil express its summer thought in bean leaves and blossoms” (406). He also compares his work to making music: “They were beans cheerfully returning to their wild and primitive state that I cultivated, and my hoe played the Ranz des Vaches for them” (407). This mode of cultivation is clearly different from commercial farming. Raymond Williams points out that Virgil’s *Georgics* can at times morph into an impractical idealization of agriculture, where political and economic issues are ignored (17). Thoreau, however, is rejecting commercial farming and capitalism in this instance, and he uses the georgic mode to represent his attachment to this particular environment.

III. Fuller and Native Americans

As Fuller lacks the sense of belonging that Thoreau has, she tries to represent those who do have it, Native Americans, in a positive light, aiming to change the public’s opinion of Native American tribes by avoiding the stereotypical polarities of the noble savage or the degraded brute, but in doing so, she subscribes to the narrative of the
vanishing American. As Christina Zwarg argues, “Fuller’s witness to the crisis of Native Americans sometimes caused her to endorse the discourse of the ‘vanishing American,’ which, historians remind us, became a deadly excuse for the aggressive expansion of European culture” (626). Fuller refers to the dislocation and devastation of Native Americans as inevitable facts. For example, after sympathizing with their situation, Fuller writes, “But the power of fate is with the white man, and the Indian feels it” (71). By suggesting that the rise of Europeans over the Indian is a matter of “fate,” Fuller affirms Manifest Destiny, suggesting that God has designed this hostile takeover.

She maintains this imperialist stance, when considering the integration of Native tribes into American society. Fuller writes,

> Amalgamation would afford the only true and profound means of civilization. But nature seems, like all else, to declare, that this race is fated to perish. Those of mixed blood fade early, and are not generally a fine race. They lose what is best in either type, rather then enhance the value of each, by mingling. (my emphasis, 120)

Fuller both desires and disavows assimilation here. She would rather see Native Americans perish as noble emblems of their race than see them mix with other races and lose their purity. I use the term “mix” here in both biological and cultural senses. It refers to the combined blood in the progeny of those of differing descent, but it also alludes to the cultural incorporation that would take place after Europeans developed the continent. Such combinations and mixtures do not suggest a comfortable assimilation of races by any means. Fuller repeatedly suggests that miscegenation leads to the abasement of pure races.

In addition to the racial purity of the natives due to their isolation on the continent
for so many years, the purity and nobility of Native Americans also stems from the metonymic relation they have with the landscape. Fuller writes,

A traveler observes, that the white settlers, who live in the woods, soon become sallow, lanky, and dejected; the atmosphere of the trees does not agree with Caucasian lungs, and it is, perhaps, in part, an instinct of this, which causes the hatred of the new settlers towards trees. The Indian breathed the atmosphere of the forests freely; he loved their shade. As they are effaced from the land, he flees too; a part of the same manifestation, which cannot linger behind its proper era. (120-1)

Here, Fuller illustrates how the defacement of the land and the defacement of Native Americans are equivalent: both emanating from the same “manifestation.” Hence, the civilizing practices of the U.S. disrupt both the Native Americans and the land itself. Fuller’s assessment of this problem targets the new settlers, rather than those in power, declaring that the new settlers have an instinctual “hatred” of the trees, since the trees create an atmosphere not conducive to their lungs. It is interesting that Fuller declares herself “observer” here, as she is throughout the text and does not express what her relation to the trees is. Hence, on the one hand Fuller redeems Native Americans by suggesting their blood is noble (noble because of its unmixed racial purity and its metonymic connection to the landscape); on the other hand, her notions of racial purity are disturbing because she targets immigrants as the source of environmental and national degradation and complies with the myth of the so-called “vanishing American.” She also omits her own problematic relation to nature, as a tourist and travel writer that appropriates nature for commercial purposes.31

31 In “The Uses of Landscape: The Picturesque Aesthetic and the National Park System,” Alison Byerly argues that the picturesque was an artistic framing technique that “represented an elitist appropriation of the environment” (53) by containing nature to an aesthetic object. Similarly, Fuller seems to be taking picturesque snapshots, rather than truly connecting to the land, although she desires this deeper connection.
Monika Müller suggests that Fuller was knowledgeable about race theories of hybridity that were popular during the nineteenth century. Müller confirms that “nineteenth century racial otherness was perceived as threatening, uncanny, and even slightly monstrous,” and it was believed that the mixing of races could lead to the possible “annihilation” of pure races (191). However, Müller also argues that Fuller believed in the mixing of races in order to better civilization (194), pointing to the story of “Muckwa, or the Bear” that appears in *Summer on the Lakes*. In this fable there is an interspecies relationship between Muckwa, a Native American, and a She-bear; they yield two sons from their marriage: one is human and one is a bear. Müller explains that in the hybridity theory of W.F. Edwards, the mixing of distant races could yield two pure types rather than a mixed type (193). While this does suggest that Fuller was knowledgeable of nineteenth-century race theories, it does not support Müller’s other claim that Fuller supported such mixing. In fact, the story ends with Muckwa killing his bear sister-in-law and being asked to leave the bear encampment and return to his own people, suggesting that this interspecies mixing did not succeed.

Fuller sounds like she would prefer to let Native Americans vanish completely, so she can honor them in a museum, rather than watch them undergo degradation. Fuller’s ideas about memorializing Native Americans can be read as evidence of her sympathy, but they also reveal her desire to render Native tribes inert. Fuller writes,

> I have no hope of .... saving the Indian from immediate degradation, and speedy death...I wish there might be some masterly attempt to reproduce, in art or literature, what is proper to them, a kind of beauty and grandeur, which few of the every-day crowd have hearts to feel, yet which ought to leave in the world its monuments, to inspire the thought of genius through all ages. (121)
Art and literature are apparently more capable of maintaining the integrity of the Native American than the natives themselves. By transplanting the so-called “owners of the soil” to a new context – art – Fuller suggests that they can keep their authenticity, which is something that Fuller is deeply invested in finding for herself (113). Since art makes time stand still, it freezes the metonymic relation between the Natives and the land, figuratively shutting down the potential for immigrants to remake the metonymy with nature. She can also placate her fears, by containing Native Americans to a library shelf or a monument, and ameliorate any guilt she might have over the policies and violence that are producing the myth of the vanishing American.

Artistic representations are presented as both problem and solution when it comes to Fuller’s concept of authenticity. When she advocates memorializing Native Americans, she does not find objectifying people in artistic form problematic; however, objectifying nature (Niagara Falls) is a hindrance to her because it obstructs original experience. Additionally, artistic representations of nature, in general, never seem to generate the sublime feeling one has in nature’s presence. Fuller’s text continually wrestles with this problem, as she seems aware that the objective of the text is impossible to achieve. Indeed, no text can bring one into the proximate and contiguous relationship with nature that generates belonging, while metonymy is a useful figure to represent the relationship she desires with nature, it does not evoke the feeling as well as experience does.

This lack of emotion may be why art is an appealing medium to represent Native Americans for Fuller. She allocates Native American memory to the realm of art, rather
than to nature. As part of nature, it will continually threaten to reappear to people like her, who are attempting to have an original experience in nature. Art becomes a way of memorializing the natives, but it is also another way of displacing them from the land, as she wishes to move them from a space she desires to connect with individually. Yet throughout the text Fuller repeatedly demonstrates the difficulty of severing person from place. In fact, her primary fear seems to be over the inability to separate person from context, hence her anxiety over particular racial groups mixing with the American soil.

This is best depicted when Fuller discusses her reaction to Niagara Falls:

After awhile it so drew me into itself as to inspire an undefined dread, such as I never knew before, such as may be felt when death is about to usher us into a new existence. The perpetual trampling of the waters seized my senses. I felt that no other sound, however near, could be heard, and would start and look behind me for a foe. I realized the identity of that mood of nature in which these waters were poured down with such absorbing force, with that in which the Indian was shaped on the same soil. For continually upon my mind came, unsought and unwelcome, images, such as never haunted it before, of naked savages stealing behind me with uplifted tomahawks; again and again this illusion recurred, and even after I had thought it over, and tried to shake it off, I could not help starting and looking behind me. (4)

Here, nature seems to be catalyzing images of the natives; Fuller is unable to separate the scene from those that she sees as “shaped on the same soil.” These figures, however, are not placid. They haunt her mind, staying with her even after she has left the falls. It is fair to say that Fuller feels like a foreigner in this place and an unwelcome one at that. These are not merely images of a guilty conscience however. Niagara Falls was the quintessential symbol of American identity, depicted in art.32 Here it is figured as a

32 For a good analysis of the importance of Niagara Falls in art and literature see Elizabeth McKinsey’s *Niagara Falls: Icon of the American Sublime*. Additionally, in *By the Law of Nature: Form and Value in Nineteenth-Century America* Howard Horwitz discusses the sublime and landscape painting in nineteenth-century America, focusing on the Hudson River School and the work of painters like Thomas Cole.
violent scene, but the so-called authentic owners of this landscape are only figures of her imagination, so their power, in a way, has already been removed. In other words, Fuller enacts the image of the vanishing American from the very beginning of the text, depicting Native Americans as already displaced. Fuller suggests that it is now the memory and guilt over the way Native Americans were violently displaced that has to be contended with, and she is somewhat perplexed about how to handle it, as it is a volatile memory that not only haunts her and the American imaginary, but problematizes her capacity to reach authentic experience.

Fuller’s inability to find authenticity stems from the disjuncture between herself and a transcendent nature, but it also results from her ascription of memory to the landscape. She writes, “How happy the Indians must have been here! It is not long since they were driven away, and the ground, above and below, is full of their traces. ‘The earth is full of men’” (32-3). In a similar manner, when she discusses Niagara Falls, she writes, “It is fearful, too, to know, as you look, that whatever has been swallowed by the cataract, is like[ly] to rise suddenly to light here, whether up-rooted tree, or body of man or bird” (5). This is emblematic of Fuller’s take on nature: whatever it consumes will be recycled and returned to the surface. She means this in more than an ecological sense, as culture here mingles with nature and returns to the earth, sometimes haunting the present. Renée L. Bergland argues, “The horrors of this discursive practice are clear: the Indians who are transformed into ghosts cannot be buried or evaded, and the specter of their forced disappearance haunts the American nation and the American imagination” (5).
Hence, while Fuller is searching for an original experience in nature, the dead will not
stay buried as they return to the present and threaten to appear in America’s future.

IV. Thoreau and Native Americans

In *Walden*, Thoreau also uncovers remnants of Native American civilizations as
he plows his fields.

As I drew a still fresher soil about the rows with my hoe, I disturbed the ashes of
unchronicled nations who in primeval years lived under these heavens and their
small implements of war and hunting were brought to the light of this modern
day. They lay mingled with other natural stones, some of which bore the marks
of having been burned by Indian fires, and some by the sun, and also bits of
pottery and glass brought hither by the recent cultivators of the soil. When my
hoe tinkled against the stones, that music echoed to the woods and the sky, and
was an accompaniment to my labor which yielded an instant and immeasurable
crop. (408)

His depiction of turning up these Native American relics is not troubled like Fuller’s
depictions of Native Americans. Thoreau suggests that he is carrying on the circle of life,
participating in something bigger than this historical moment. He refers not only to
Native American tribes that inhabited Walden Pond, but he also refers to the early white
settlers, whose remnants also turn up in the soil. Once again Thoreau’s labor becomes an
art form, as the music he makes through agrarian labor resounds with the sounds of
ancient civilizations, bringing all in tune for a brief moment. The result of his work
creates an “immeasurable crop”; one that the reader knows is not measured according to
the amount of beans he produces, but rather the divine connection he makes with the
earth and previous civilizations through his labor.

Thoreau is not plagued by the fact that these are “unchronicled nations,” whereas
Fuller desperately wants to document Native American culture appropriately in *Summer.*
The experience between the two, however, is vastly different because Thoreau is not witnessing Native American displacement, while Fuller does. She states, “Although I have little to tell, I feel that I have learnt a great deal of the Indians, from observing them even in this broken and degraded condition” (153). Hence Fuller is reacting to what she sees. In *Walden*, however, Thoreau’s only interaction with Native American culture is through ancient objects: harmless trinkets that can be emblems of meaning, but will never convey the severity of what Fuller is seeing in the Midwest. Additionally, Thoreau feels connected to Native American culture through his labor and does not see himself as different from them; he declares himself “the homestaying, laborious *native* of the soil” (my emphasis 406).

V. Fuller and Immigration

Another reason that Fuller struggles with her search for authenticity is because she conflates the transcendental idea of having an individual and original relation to the universe with national authenticity. Anne Baker argues that Fuller’s work contains an unresolved contradiction. Baker suggests that Fuller wants to be a “transcendent individual,” but she also “regards national identity…as a positive means for bringing what one sees into focus and giving it meaning” (61). In fact, sometimes it is difficult to decipher what type of authenticity Fuller is searching for, because she slips between the two. This happens in part, because while she desires such a personal experience, her travels in the wilderness are overwhelmed by national problems. She sees Native Americans and immigrant groups interacting with nature, which seems to block her potential to connect to nature in an individual and transcendent manner.
For Fuller, the present that was threatening America’s future was not only the removal of Native Americans, but also the influx of immigrants during the 1840s. While European immigrants were not treated with the same contempt as African Americans or Native Americans, it is important to keep in mind that not all persons of “white” skin in the nineteenth century were granted the same degree of white privilege. Matthew Frye Jacobson argues that many immigrant groups were not considered equals with those of Anglo-Saxon heritage. Jacobson writes, “American scholarship on immigration has generally conflated race and color, and so has transported a late-twentieth-century understanding of ‘difference’ into a period whose inhabitants recognized biologically based ‘races’ rather than culturally based ‘ethnicities” (6). The naturalization law of 1790 granted citizenship to “free white persons”; however, as Jacobson points out, the definition of “free white persons” became questionable, as many “undesirable” whites entered the country. Most critics of *Summer on the Lakes* discuss only the topic of immigration in relation to what Fuller says about the difficulties facing foreign women in the wilderness, but she also refers to how immigration in general might be threatening to the formation of American identity, thus adhering to Jacobson’s idea that there were degrees of whiteness (and white privilege) during the nineteenth century.

Fuller often depicts immigrants as filthy and greedy, as people with no respect for the land. She writes that many of the new settler dwellings “showed plainly that they had no thought beyond satisfying the grossest material wants” (29). She concludes, “Their progress is Gothic, not Roman, and their mode of cultivation will, in the course of

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33 For example, Carmen Birkle’s “Travelogues of Independence: Margaret Fuller and Henry David Thoreau” focuses on the difficulties facing settler women in *Summer on the Lakes*. 
twenty, perhaps ten, years, obliterate the natural expression of the country” (29). This differs from her comments about Native American dwellings, which are in perfect harmony with nature (29). Fuller’s anxiety about immigration is expressed as apprehension over a potentially changing landscape. In this passage, her concern is not over the immigrant, but over nature and what might happen to it. Hence, Fuller often represents the immigrant as an agent that will deform the landscape by commodifying nature, or by mixing with it in a way that creates a new and undesirable metonymy.

VI. The Commodification of Nature

Trepidation over the commodification of nature is obvious in both Fuller and Thoreau. Indeed, both authors criticize the materialization of America. Thoreau claims that one of humanity’s biggest mistakes is “regarding the soil as property” (415). He hints at the problem of land ownership, when he relays the story of naming Walden Pond. Thoreau writes, “an old squaw, named Walden, escaped, and from her the pond was named” (431). He proposes other possible reasons for the naming of the pond, suggesting that perhaps an English noble named “Saffron Walden” discovered and named the pond. Finally he puts forward that perhaps for practical reasons, based on the topography of the pond, it was named Walden because it is a “Walled-in Pond” (432). In this instance, Thoreau is clearly trying to evade the problem of ownership that comes along with place naming. Hence he puts forth multiple explanations for its name, demonstrating that even Native Americans have laid claim on the land. His final suggestion, based on the topography of the area, seems to be the explanation Thoreau favors. Although place naming is a language act, this final explanation is most closely
related to an act of nature – the physical geography of the landscape – rather than an act of human ownership over the pond.

Thoreau’s criticism of the commercialization of nature reveals the power he sees in nature. He makes repeated references to the feeble attempts entrepreneurs have made trying to make money off Walden. For example, Thoreau tells the story of the ice collectors who arrived one winter with all their equipment and started skimming the ice off the pond (535). He depicts the exercise as a money hungry endeavor, which is not very successful, as most of the ice does not get sold, and the pond recovers most of what is taken from it (537). This suggests that nature always has the upper hand, and there is nothing we can really take from nature that it cannot recover. In fact, Thoreau represents nature not simply as a passive entity getting raked over by humanity, but as possessing the capacity to act. Walden Pond enacts revenge on those attempting to take from it. Thoreau writes, “But sometimes Squaw Walden had her revenge and a hired man walking behind his team, slipped through a crack in the ground down toward Tartarus, and he who was so brave before suddenly became but the ninth part of a man…or sometimes the frozen soil took a piece of steel out of a ploughshare, or a plough got set in the furrow and had to be cut out” (536). Here Thoreau suggests that sometimes nature communicates with powerful actions rather than passivity.

Fuller also condemns the commercialization of nature in *Summer*, as seen in her trip to Niagara Falls, where she denounces the roadside attractions that have come to line the surrounding area. She criticizes the chained eagle she sees, as it reminds her of one she saw chained in her childhood. Fuller compares the chained animal to a wild soaring
one and comments, “yet I know not that I felt more on seeing the bird in all its natural
freedom and royalty than when, imprisoned and insulted, he had filled my early thoughts
with the Byronic ‘silent rages’ of misanthropy” (6). Here, she suggests that although
seeing the chained eagle is terrible, it does evoke great empathy and rage in her, more
emotion than seeing the animal free. This is emblematic of Fuller’s method of promoting
preservation: nature is a tragic victim to the hands of man, and it is unable to free itself,
but by illustrating this state of disgrace, one can generate great sympathy for nature.

VII. Thoreau, Immigrants, and Nature

Like Fuller, Thoreau shows much of the same ambivalence toward immigrants
because of their racially motivated utilitarian approach to nature. 34 Thoreau sustains Irish
stereotypes, particularly in his chapter entitled “Baker Farm.” On his way to Fair Haven,
he takes shelter from a rainstorm at the “hut” of John Field. Thoreau studies and
describes the Irish Field family in great detail:

I had sat there many times of old before the ship was built that floated this family
to America. An honest, hard-working, but shiftless man plainly was John Field;
and his wife, she too was brave to cook so many successive dinners in the
recesses of that lofty stove; with round greasy face and bare breast, still thinking
to improve her condition one day; with the never absent mop in one hand, and yet
no effects of it visible anywhere. (452)

Thoreau both compliments and derides the Fields throughout this chapter. As evident in
this passage, Thoreau seems to be praising the couple for being “hard-working,”
“honest,” and “brave.” However, he also undercuts such compliments by painting a

34 Like Margaret Fuller’s ambivalent behavior toward immigrants, Thoreau had a history of both sympathy
and disgust for the Irish. Helen Lojek’s “Thoreau’s Bog People” argues that Thoreau shared “most of his
society’s prevailing anti-Irish sentiments,” even though his journal documents him aiding some Irish
families from time to time (279-80).
picture of dirt and filth in the Field home. Mrs. Field might be “brave,” but she is also “greasy” and apparently not a good housekeeper, as the home shows “no effects” of the mop figuratively tied to her hand. Thoreau reiterates the stereotypical association between the Irish and filth; a correlation that multiplied exponentially during the Cholera outbreaks of 1832 and 1849.\(^{35}\)

Thoreau also emasculates what should be the Fields’ most cherished quality – their assiduous approach to life. While many would consider this an attribute, Thoreau suggests that it reveals a flaw in Mr. Field’s intellectual capacities. Thoreau believes that one does not have to “work hard,” if he or she does not “live hard,” letting go of some of the finer comforts in life and agreeing to live a life of simplicity without superfluous material objects allows one to live without hard work. The root of Thoreau’s derision seems to be over the Fields’ material desires. He refers to the spread of “tea, and coffee, and butter, and milk, and beef” his host lays out for him, depicting such items as great luxuries that generate a cycle of difficulty, since John Field would need to work hard to obtain such items and then “eat hard” to sustain his work (452). However, while materiality may be at the core of the problem, race clearly has come into play here, as Thoreau sees John Field as a product of his race confined by his limitations in intellect and destined to live a life of squalor.

Indeed, Thoreau does not view this Irish family as capable of bettering their situation, as their racial determinism has established their destiny. For example, Thoreau concludes his depiction of John Field commenting, “With his horizon all his own, yet he

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\(^{35}\) Alan M. Kraut’s *Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the ‘Immigrant Menace’* describes Irish stereotypes and the association between the Irish and filth in detail in chapter two.
a poor man, born to be poor, with his inherited Irish poverty or poor life, his Adam’s grandmother and boggy ways, not to rise in this world, he nor his posterity, till their wading webbed bog-trotting feet get *talaria* to their heels” (456). What is important to notice here is not only that Thoreau is perpetuating the idea of racial determinism, but also that he is attaching an immigrant race to a particular kind of environmental space – the Irish swamp. The bog is a direct reference to the natural landscape of Ireland; bogs are to Ireland as Niagara is to America, a quintessential symbol of their identity. Thoreau immerses John Field into the Irish landscape here, animalizing the Irish and suggesting that he will not ascend his origins. It is not simply a condemnation of one man, but rather an entire family symbolic of the Irish race in general, for Thoreau states that Field’s “posterity” will not “rise in the world” either. Harshly critical of the family’s lack of education, Thoreau writes,

…therefore I suppose they still take life bravely, after their fashion, face to face, giving it tooth and nail, not having skill to split its massive columns with any fine entering wedge, and rout it in detail; thinking to deal with it roughly, as one should handle a thistle. But they fight at an overwhelming disadvantage – living, John Field, alas! without arithmetic, and failing so. (454)

While Fuller was sympathetic with the Midwestern immigrant’s lack of education, Thoreau does not offer much compassion, suggesting the Irish are destined for such a life. He writes, “But alas! the culture of the Irishman is an enterprise to be undertaken with a sort of moral bog hoe” (453). The bog reference suggests a refusal to let Field drop his Irishness, his metonymy with that other land.
However, while Fuller questions if nature can maintain its authenticity with the influx of immigrants working the land, Thoreau does not question the stability of nature at all. Thoreau writes,

In such a day, in September or October, Walden is a perfect forest mirror, set round with stones as precious to my eye as if fewer or rarer. Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water. It needs no fence. Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun’s hay brush – this the light dustcloth – which retains no breath that is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still. (437)

This passage contains a very clear explanation of what nature is to Thoreau. It is not only a site of purity, but also a resilient being. It will not change in the face of national issues, as nations “come and go,” but Walden Pond remains the same. It has no boundaries and heeds to none, needing “no fence” to keep others out. The passage also reveals the tension between different parts of nature; for while the term “nature” is all encompassing, in reality different parts of the natural world are not always at peace with each other. Hence, no storm or dust can disturb Walden Pond, thus displaying the pond’s resiliency to other natural disruptions, as well as cultural ones. As a forest mirror, Walden Pond acts as the ultimate venue to reveal the self, which is of course part of transcendental dogma.

This purifying force can hardly be threatened by immigration or modern technology. Thoreau writes definitively,

Nevertheless, of all the characters I have known, perhaps Walden wears best, and best preserves its purity. Many men have been likened to it, but few deserve that honor. Though the woodchoppers have laid bare first this shore and then that, and
the Irish have built their sties by it, and the railroad has infringed on its border, and the icemen have skimmed it once, it is itself unchanged, the same water which my youthful eyes fell on; all the change is in me. (441)

He points to poor Irish immigrants and, like Fuller, there is a bit of disdain in the way he calls their homes “sties.” However, this does not phase Thoreau’s take on nature or its transcendental potential, for Walden “best preserves its purity.” In fact Walden Pond can ward off change from racial infringement, from people that wish to commercialize its resources like the icemen, and from industrialization represented by the railroad. In The Environmental Imagination, Lawrence Buell writes, “Yet Thoreau became increasingly interested in defining nature’s structure, both spiritual and material, for its own sake, as against how nature might subserve humanity, which was Emerson’s primary concern” (117). This would be a preservationist impulse according to Buell, but Thoreau does not push for protection like a modern environmental, preservationist would, as he sees nature as capable of rejuvenating itself. In other words, Thoreau’s nature is of a higher power than man, and therefore it will always be able to protect itself against mankind. Fuller’s early preservationism, in contrast, sees nature as deeply threatened by humanity. How can these two Transcendentalists have such vastly different views of nature?

VIII. Conclusions

Indeed, these opposing views evoke questions about nature itself. What is the capacity of nature? Is it an ever resilient entity as Thoreau suggests, always reproducing its authentic self? Or is it on the brink of destruction as Fuller implies, awaiting material and metaphoric contamination due to racialized immigration?
When Fuller states that “the very oak trees will not know them apart, - will not know… itself,” she suggests that nature can have an identity and “know” things. This anthropomorphization of nature is a source of great debate among ecocritics. On the one hand, anthropomorphizing nature is a process of self-projection, where we solipsistically suggest that everything in this world is of human beings; this obviously does not adhere to the agenda of many preservationists, who claim that nature has a value in itself and is more than an extension of humanity. On the other hand, some ecocritics like Michael Bryson argue that anthropomorphism is a method that can lead to a process of recognition: through attempting to imagine the other (nature) to be like oneself, one will discover its difference from oneself and be able to empathize with it more effectively.

Fuller’s work begins the process of recognition by suggesting that nature can perhaps “know itself”; however, she is still thinking about nature as inescapably linked to nationalism; a nationalism that requires racist policies against “impure” immigrants that threaten to contaminate the purity of the land. She is concerned about the national and transcendental value ascribed to the pristine American landscape, which is in peril in her eyes. When she suggests that oak trees will become blind to difference located in bodies resulting in the trees’ loss of identity, Fuller suggests that nature is bound to culture. Thus, while Fuller entertains the idea that nature acts of its own accord, she questions this potential power, and in this way, her early preservationist vision falters.

Obliterating racial difference by mixing Native American and immigrant heritages results in the effacement of nature in this paradigm: on that account, Fuller fears that racial mixing will cause nature to lose its authenticity. The racial displacement of
one group is replaced by a new kind of mixing: no longer are Native Americans mixed with the American land, but European immigrants, who “belong” to other lands like the Irish “belong” to the bogs or Ireland, will mix with the new American landscape. This replacement of inhabitants will generate new metonymies, but understanding the effects of these metonymies requires comprehending both parts of the figure – immigrant and space. Thus for Fuller, understanding the effects of immigration on America begins with landscape, and it spurs important questions about nature and its potential power or vulnerability.

Clearly, Fuller is questioning her transcendental philosophy in *Summer on the Lakes*. Emerson suggests that nature is always an extension of the self, as the point of idealism is to transcend the material world (“The Transcendentalist” 94). In his lecture entitled “The Transcendentalist,” Emerson writes about the mark that individuals can leave on the world; he says that transcendentalists “shall abide in beauty and strength, to reorganize themselves in nature, to invest themselves anew in other, perhaps higher endowed and happier mixed clay than ours, in fuller union with the surrounding system” (my emphasis, 104). Both Emerson and Fuller figure humans mixing with earth for symbolic purposes. For Fuller it stands for the potential annihilation of original nature in America due to miscegenation, Indian Removal policies, and new immigrant land owners who may contaminate this pure space. Both authors suggest that the clay of this world is deeply troubled; the difference between them is that while Emerson looks to a higher sphere for the rise of Transcendentalism, Fuller gets stuck focusing on the ground – wedged within the problems of race and nationalism. Perhaps Fuller fears not only that
nature might be losing its authenticity, but also that nature might never have held the
capacity to achieve “an original relation to the universe” to begin with.

The ambivalence present in *Summer on the Lakes* illustrates that Fuller was not
simply putting forth a transcendental view of nature; rather she was questioning her
views of the environment. It is in the moments where Fuller envisions nature as a site of
purity that she writes her most anxiety ridden anti-miscegenation comments, as the fear
of losing an authentic landscape generates a debate over questions she cannot answer.
Even in its ambivalence, however, *Summer* yields a platform for environmental
principles; Fuller’s nature is vulnerable to human behavior, and she takes an anti-
materialist stance, criticizing the utilitarian view of nature. However, what is disturbing
here is how easily Fuller’s desire to preserve nature gets co-opted into a national politics
of pure identity.

While the social impact of conflating certain ethnic groups with nature has been
addressed in literary criticism, the interaction between nature and race in the nineteenth
century also has environmental repercussions, which have not been examined. This
ideology of purity was the bedrock for what in the late nineteenth century would become
sanitary science and early environmentalism.\(^{36}\) While we traditionally think of these
ideas as derivatives of the rise of industrialization and urbanization, they have deep
cultural roots connected to ideas about race and the nation. Fuller and Thoreau display

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\(^{36}\) For the connection between sanitary science and early environmentalism see Lawrence Buell’s *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. This will also be the topic of chapter 4 of this dissertation.
different visions of nature, but both authors illustrate how the racialized body, in the form of the immigrant and the indigene, affects their idea of nature and its capabilities.

Most ecocritics argue that our environmental crisis can only be fixed through ideological change. Their prescription is simple: if humans think of themselves as part of nature, then they will advocate for it. However, feeling that one is a part of nature is really another way of saying that one belongs to a given place, and the way Americans belong to nature, as demonstrated by Fuller and Thoreau, is complicated by a history of racial politics and national production. Therefore, such a reconnection to nature will be far from simple, and it is not even clear if this environmental prescription will actually yield the environmental platform that it projects.\textsuperscript{37} After all, Thoreauvian belonging in \textit{Walden} did not generate a vision of nature as vulnerable to human destruction. What is clear, however, is if we wish to understand the way Americans belong to the natural environment, then we must open up that exploration well beyond its traditional boundaries, because even the Transcendentalist’s connection to nature did not happen in a vacuum, as it was inflected with issues of race and national politics.

\textsuperscript{37} For more on the limits of reconnecting humans to the environment see Robert Kirkman’s \textit{Skeptical Environmentalism: The Limits of Philosophy and Science}. 
Ellen Richards’ 1910 scientific treatise entitled *Euthenics: the Science of Controllable Environment* promotes environmental cleanliness and the purification of American identity. *Euthenics* interprets race with a biological lens targeting foreign immigrants. “Contaminated” foreigners threaten much more than the physical health of the nation’s citizens: in this text immigrants jeopardize the home, and synecdochally the nation, by carrying and spreading two dangerous and invisible perpetrators—germs and undesirable blood lines. Richards depicts the immigrant body as a threat to the spaces of America, suggesting an association between environmental and racial purity that can also be found in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Herland*. Gilman’s earlier work “The Yellow Wallpaper” establishes continuity between body and space reflective of sanitary science, and her later work, *Herland*, takes this continuity a step farther establishing a female nation “pure” in race and space, an achievement established by executing the principles of sanitarianism and environmental conservationism. While critics have discussed how Gilman’s female utopia promotes eugenics, few have linked how Gilman, like Richards, associates a clean environment with a clean race. Richards and Gilman wrote during the
rise of sanitary science and environmentalism, and both participated in an ideological sanitarianism, a method of purification fed by nineteenth-century science. These texts illustrate how American women were called upon to secure the borders of the home, to sanitize and preserve this space for the future citizens of the nation, maintaining the “boundaries” of whiteness and the “purity” of the home.

By the early twentieth century, both sanitary science and environmentalism were on the rise. The work of Ellen Swallow Richards bridged the concepts of ecology and home economics, and while these seem like two very different fields, they were clearly connected in her work. In 1873 she was the first woman to graduate from MIT, where she studied chemistry and developed her own concept of environmental science (Clarke 37, 43). Richards dedicated herself to the idea of public health, because “she saw that the definitive value of all knowledge was subordinate to the health of man and the quality of his environment” (Clarke 36). In other words, Richards saw environment as

38 In The Truth of Ecology, Dana Phillips describes the rise of Ecology in the latter half of the nineteenth century as a reactionary response to microbiology and the shift in the sciences toward “greater specialization and a narrowing focus on smaller and smaller entities” (52). Early ecologists like Frederic Clements and Henry Chandler Cowles focused on the interactions between all elements within a given environment, hence taking a step back from the minutiae of microbiology. Home economics of the 1890s was also influenced by microbiology, as the rise of germ theory substantiated the need for cleanliness within the home to deter the spread of domestic diseases. While spurred by the microbe, home economists focused on the home, rather than the great outdoors. Although the domestic science movement focused on interior spaces and ecologists studied exterior ones, the striking similarity between the two disciplines is the notion that all elements of a given space interact and affect one another on a biological level.

39 Ellen Richards, also known as Ellen Henrietta Swallow, was heavily influenced by Ernst Haeckel’s concept of “oekologie” according to Robert Clarke. Oekologie, similar to today’s concept of ecology, is the “study of organisms in their environment” (Clarke 39). The word comes from the Greek root “Oikos,” meaning house, a connection that did not go unnoticed by Richards. She studied chemistry and mineralogy alongside Haeckel’s work at MIT and eventually developed her own concept of environmental science. In many ways, her work was a bridge between ecological principles, urban environments, and interior spaces. Robert Gottlieb explains, “It was through the home economics movement that Swallow [Richards] popularized her concepts of oekologie and euthenics, with different environments – whether urban or Nature-based – defined as interactive rather than separate and discrete” (217).
fundamental to one’s potential growth or degeneracy. In an effort to enhance the
likelihood of the former, she promoted sanitary science, advocating standards for clean
air, food, and water.

In writing *Euthenics*, Richards joined a health movement that was already well
underway. In *The Gospel of Germs*, Nancy Tomes explains:

Between the 1880s and the 1920s Americans of all ages were subjected to
aggressive public health campaigns that taught them the new lessons of the
laboratory: that microscopic living particles were the agents of contagion, that
sick bodies shed germs into the environment, and that disease spread[s] by
seemingly innocuous behaviors such as coughing, sneezing, and spitting, sharing
common drinking cups, or failing to wash hands before eating. (7)

It is no accident that the new understanding of germ theory and sanitary science happened
at the same moment as environmental conservation and preservation movements, which
were spurred by Gifford Pinchot and John Muir.40 Both sanitarianism and
environmentalism require the ecological understanding that humans affect their
environment and are affected by their environment. Lawrence Buell points out that “the
two persuasions share the conviction that the biological environment ought to be more
pristine than it is, ought to be healthy, soul-nurturing habitat” (*Endangered World* 38).

Thus when Ellen Richards and other sanitarians began pushing for better
environmental conditions in order to prevent disease, their attempts to clean the
environment and clean the home were seen as two versions of the same endeavor.

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40 For more information on the history of conservation and preservation in the United States, see Benjamin
Kline’s *First Along the River: a Brief History of the U.S. Environmental Movement*, and Gifford Pinchot’s
role in conservationism is well documented in *Gifford Pinchot and the Making of Modern
history of women and the environmental movement; chapter six, “Preserving the Earth,” documents how
women during the Progressive Era participated in early conservation movements.
Richards fixated on the home, because sanitarians linked certain diseases to “defective plumbing, ventilation, and housekeeping” (Tomes 8). Hence, for the sanitarian, “environment” did not refer only to the outside world but referred more generically to one’s surroundings. In fact, the line between interior and exterior gets increasingly thin in *Euthenics*.

When describing the home, Richards writes, “The ideal of ‘home’ is protection from dangers from *within* – bad habits, bad food, bad air, dirt and abuse, -shelter, in fact, from all stunting agencies” (73). Consequently, the home should protect a person not simply from the external world, but also from the behaviors and pollutants that can contaminate a person from the *inside*. This demonstrates how Richards internalizes external pollutants like “dirt,” suggesting that contaminants can be absorbed and become a part of one’s being. In a similar manner, racial tensions have been re-imagined as a threat to the home, one that may invade the home and, by contaminating this space, infect the bodies and minds of those who inhabit it.

Richards defines euthenics as “The betterment of living conditions, through conscious endeavor, for the purpose of securing efficient human beings” (vii). She suggests that by creating a clean environment humans will become more “efficient” workers. Richards spends much of her first chapter giving statistics to validate the economic value of good health. For example, Richards writes, “Dr. George M. Gould

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41 Amy Kaplan’s “Manifest Domesticity” explains this paradox in relation to American imperialism. She argues that while domestic unity typically requires strict domestic borders, sometimes these borders are “obliterated” in nineteenth-century texts because the nation was geographically expanding while it was simultaneously trying to generate national unity at home (588). The focus here, however, is how environmental and microbiological principles eradicate the barrier between inside and out, because environmental elements, like air and water, and biological ones, like germs, do not heed to such borders. Kaplan’s ideas about the foreign versus the domestic are relevant here in the form of the immigrant versus the “American”; unlike Kaplan, however, my work explores how the environmental movement and sanitary science participated in the foreign/domestic dichotomy.
estimated that sickness and death in the United States cost $3,000,000,000 annually, of which at least one-third is regarded as preventable” (5). Indeed, sanitary science has an explicit purpose: it is designed to make the capitalist machine run more effectively, making the nation strong economically. However, this economic benefit is tied to ideas of national purity. As David Roediger suggests in his landmark text *The Wages of Whiteness*, “White labor does not just receive and resist racist ideas but embraces, adopts and at times, murderously acts upon those ideas. The problem is not just that the white working class is at critical junctures manipulated into racism, but that it comes to think of itself and its interests as white” (12). Roediger’s argument relates to Richards’ work because her dream of healthy and efficient labor is yoked to a mythic vision of a pure, white American race.

Certainly, her ambition is not merely based on economics; Richards’ nationalist aspirations to control the environment are bound to racial tensions of the late nineteenth century. It is no accident that “euthenics” resembles “eugenics,” for Richards supports the concept of eugenics, but she argues that it requires many generations to take effect. Therefore, she proposes euthenics as something that can immediately be set in play to enhance the American race:

Eugenics deals with race improvement through heredity. Euthenics deals with race improvement through environment. Eugenics is hygiene for the future generations. Euthenics is hygiene for the present generation. Eugenics must await careful investigation. Euthenics has immediate opportunity. Euthenics precedes eugenics, developing better men now, and thus inevitably creating a better race of men in the future. Euthenics is the term proposed for the preliminary science on which Eugenics must be based. (vii)
Clearly Richards’ goal is racial purification, and she sees euthenics, controlling one’s environment, as an immediate opportunity to work toward that goal. This “race improvement through environment” draws the intersecting ideas about space and race that were being circulated during the earlier half of the nineteenth century into direct correlation. The difference between the nativism evident in the Transcendentalists and what is happening here, however, is the new sciences of germ theory, sanitary science, and ecology, which together create a stronger scaffolding for the building of national identity.

While changes in science were occurring, the old sciences were not completely superseded by the new ones, and the difference between euthenics and eugenics approximates the difference between hard and soft Lamarckianism. The main criterion of Lamarckianism is acquired traits. Unlike Darwinism, which suggests that acquired characteristics cannot be passed on to progeny, Lamarckianism suggests that one’s ancestors acquire traits over the course of their lifetime and those acquired traits can be passed on to their progeny. Darwinism suggests that one is born with a set of traits and that set is what he or she will pass on through reproduction. Even though Darwin’s ideas were disseminated by this time, Lamarckianism was still common knowledge, and many confused or combined the evolutionary theories. Within the realm of Lamarckianism itself, however, there were also dissenting ideas about acquired traits. According to George Stocking, “hard” Lamarckians “saw the fibers of the brain as little susceptible to immediate influences of environment” (16). In contrast, “soft” Lamarckians thought “the fibers of the brain might be affected over a relatively short time period by changes in the
social environment” (16). Richards’ summation of eugenics versus euthenics aligns hard Lamarckianism with eugenics and soft Lamarckianism with euthenics. She identifies her work with soft Lamarckianism and implies that environmental changes can have quick results and improve the race through acquired traits.

Richards’ work has an undercurrent of xenophobia throughout. She continually references the “new citizens” of America, and while this refers to all children, she targets foreign immigrants. In regards to the mixing of races, she comments, “Conditions of motion, of rapid intermingling of distant populations – a thousand miles in a day is now possible – make national control a necessity” (134). Obviously diseases can spread between “intermingling populations,” but Richards’ work makes assumptions based on race. Regarding the children of immigrants, she writes,

Hope for the future is to be found in the conclusions of the immigration commission, that in one generation certain marked changes in stature and in head measurements have taken place in the children of immigrants of various nationalities, such changes as have hitherto been considered as the result of centuries. The commissioners credit the better environment and larger opportunities with these indications of increasing intellectuality and mental force. (81)

While this passage rightly suggests that environment affects the psyche, it also stereotypes first-generation immigrants, suggesting that second-generation immigrants are considerably smarter than their parents due to their exposure to the American environment during their formative years. While she suggests that eugenics produces this kind of change over “centuries,” a change in environment can make more immediate change. On the one hand, no one would deny that Richards’ desire to improve living conditions for all Americans, including immigrants, is a good thing. On the other hand,
underlying Richards’ *Euthenics* is the implication that immigrants bring diseases of body and ideology into this country that are undesirable and must be rooted out for the sake of a unified and productive nation.

Richards also targets immigrant women who work for upper-class white families during the early twentieth century, women who fall into the role of surrogate mothers, but do not fulfill that role effectively, according to her. She writes, “But with foreign domestics whose idea is to get the various duties over as soon as possible, and whose gift is not that of teaching, how is the child to grow into the normal ways of right daily living, unconsciously and effectively?” (93). Richards presumes foreign domestics are not good teachers and take no value or pride in their work. She also assumes that immigrants bring the wrong attitude into the nation: “Many of our newer citizens have come to us from the protection (?) of a personal authority that they can see and feel. In this country of ours, we have taken away that binding regard for authority, and we must as far as possible lead rather than compel” (20). The parenthetical question mark seems quite telling here, as it suggests Richards’ distaste and lack of understanding for these “newer citizens” and their alleged lack of discipline. Since these immigrants apparently have no respect for authority, Richards suggests that American women must “lead” by example in order to improve immigrant behavior. This preliminary step will assure a better race later on: “In another hundred years, then, Euthenics may give place to Eugenics, and the better race of men become an actuality” (151). Alan Kraut explains the connection between contamination and nationalism:

While some members of an immigrant group may or may not have a contagious disease that can cause others to become sick, the entire group is stigmatized by
medicalized nativism, each newcomer being reduced from ‘a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one,’ because of association with disease in the minds of the native-born. Thus there is a fear of contamination from the foreign-born. (2-3)

Indeed, nativism is evident in Richards’ *Euthenics*, as she proposes her theory as a solution to the “problem” of contamination from the foreign-born. But while Kraut looks more specifically at the medicalization of nativism, the interest here is how nativist ideology gets spacialized; contamination spreads not simply from body to body, but from body to space, altering our perception of bodies, environments, and the relationship between them.

Richards attempts to remedy her nativist impulses with a “temporary paternalism,” teaching immigrants proper domestic behavior and values, thus enhancing the nation (63-7). This paternalism, however, sounds much more like the traditionally gendered idea of maternalism, as it requires the tasks of “women’s work,” like housekeeping and child rearing. This gender reversal may be an attempt to grant more importance and authority to the teacher of eugenics by gendering it masculine. On the other hand, by calling a method of national enhancement a kind of temporary parenting, it sounds non-threatening. In the passage already quoted, Richards explains her methodology: “The very fact of a law makes many persons defy it…In this country of ours, we have taken away that binding regard for authority, and we must as far as possible lead rather than compel” (20). “Leading” here is a technique of persuasion that will create lasting results through a figurative *parenting* that calls upon mothers to secure the boundaries of the home.
Richards carefully appeals to women’s patriotism through religion, rather than focusing on the science of eugenics. She writes, “To the women of America has come an opportunity to put their education, their power of detailed work, and any initiative they may possess at the service of the State. Faith, Hope, and Courage may be taken as the three potent watchwords of the New Crusade” (11). Richards hails American women to their civic responsibility, comparing it to a religious crusade, for while the methods of sanitary science might have seemed inaccessible to women at the time, the appeal to the abstractions of “Faith, Hope, and Courage” were more likely to motivate the American woman than talk of chemistry and disease. Religious piety was an acceptable pursuit according to the cult of True Womanhood. As Barbara Welter explains, “One reason religion was valued was that it did not take a woman away from her ‘proper sphere,’ her home” (45). Thus, Richards’ scientific work becomes harmless under the guise of religion. Yet, she still emphasizes the grave importance of the work, asserting, “Eternal vigilance is the price of safety in sanitary as well as in military affairs,” equating domestic labor to military work and encouraging American women to undertake the surveillance necessary to secure the nation (56).

Along with this responsibility, women are also called to maintain the borders of whiteness. Richards suggests that racialized bodies threaten to contaminate America in all its forms (environmentally, physically, psychologically, and morally), but the bodies that threaten the nation are not necessarily those of dark skin. Richards uses a theory of race based on biology; hence the line between “whiteness” and the other is not necessarily visible, making racial tensions escalate. Matthew Frye Jacobson argues that
many “white” immigrants were not considered equal with those of Anglo-Saxon heritage. So while the naturalization law of 1790 granted citizenship to “free white persons,” the definition of “white” was not clear when it came to immigrants. Particularly in the context of turn of the century biology, whiteness was not simply a visual marker.

Just as “whiteness” is invisible to the naked eye, so is the genetic material and germs that are threatening it in Richards’ text. She writes, “Our enemies are no longer Indians, and wild animals. Those were the days of big things. Today is the day of the infinitely little. To see our cruelest enemies, we must use the microscope” (19). Richards supplants the racialized enemy of the past, Native Americans, with a new invisible adversary: germs. This suggests that racial tensions of the antebellum period have not been eradicated, but have been re-imagined as an enemy that constantly threatens to invade the interior of the individual. Hence, the battles that used to take place in the wild have been relocated inside the home, and the frontier is no longer the division between wild and civilized society but between the outside and inside of the citizen’s body. While sanitary reform seems like a positive step towards improved living conditions for lower economic classes, Richards’ work stereotypes racialized immigrants as the progenitors of uncleanliness and disease.42

Richards also suggests that sanitarianism is a process that purifies the mind as well as the body. In order to combat the threat of physical and mental contamination, eugenics requires the physical action of cleaning, but it also requires mental change. As

42 As Wald, Tomes, and Lynch suggest, “Contagion itself at once defies borders and provokes their fervent reaffirmation” (623). Likewise, sanitarianism breaks racial borders and reaffirms them; it attempts to improve immigrant conditions, but also reinforces racial stereotypes and promotes nativism.
chapter two entitled “Faith” explains, one must believe that one can control the environment in order for euthenics to work. If enacted properly, euthenics will cleanse both mind and body from contaminants and prevent further “infection” from the outside world. Richards writes, “The belief in better things must be thoroughly impressed on the individual mind. Each individual must understand that it does affect him, that it is his concern, that he must give heed to his environment. Then he may have the will and make the effort to combat the dangers to body and mind” (19). According to this prescription, one must believe Richards’ notion of the controllability of environment and then “heed” the power of nature, which will ironically generate the will to conquer the very nature to which one has submitted. Notice that the “will” can be excavated through Richards’ euthenics, but it is a “will” that acts in a very uniform and prescriptive fashion after the process of euthenics. In this way, euthenics first distills the pure mind and then preserves it to generate a homogenous national identity. Richards suggests that the environment is a baneful entity, and we must “combat the dangers to body and mind,” demonstrating how the environment can penetrate not only the bodily exterior, but the interior of the mind as well.

I. “The Yellow Wallpaper” - Space, Containment, and Infection

While many late nineteenth-century writers explored the association between environment and the individual, Charlotte Perkins Gilman offers some of the most interesting inquiries into the relationship between person and space. “The Yellow Wallpaper” questions whether Gilman’s famous narrator projects her sickness externally onto her environment, or if her environment is the source of her sickness. The space of
the narrator’s nursery can be seen as the physical representation of the narrator’s entrapment by her social circumstances or the physical representation of her psyche, which is struggling with these same challenges. The fact that the text allows for contradictory readings regarding the source of contamination (it is not clear if it comes from the narrator or from her environment) is not simply a matter of ambiguity in the text. Rather it illustrates the continuity between body, mind, and space that also appears in the science of Ellen Richards and other sanitarians.43

In opposition to the dominant interpretation of “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a psychological projection of neuroses onto the external environment, Jane Thrailkill offers a more physiological reading of the story. She argues, “So while twentieth-century critics have almost universally read the wallpaper in Gilman’s famous short story as symbolic of the narrator’s psychological state, a more thorough reading of Gilman’s own oeuvre sharply indicates that she conceived of the connection between environment and health – even between home furnishings and one’s state of mind – in physiological terms” (131). While Thrailkill allows for environmental influences on the narrator, she frames this idea within her larger argument that emotional responses to environments, as well as to aesthetic objects (like literature), result in an emotional response that is both physiological and “mindful” (1-4). While I agree that Gilman’s text displays the effect of

43 Beth Sutton-Ramspeck’s *Raising the Dust: The Literary Housekeeping of Mary Ward, Sarah Grand, and Charlotte Perkins Gilman* examines the connections between literature, housekeeping, and the public sphere. Regarding Ward, Grand, and Gilman, she argues, “These writers reenvision housekeeping as representing responsibilities with enormous public impact: making the food supply safe, ‘cleaning up’ society, improving the human race through ‘public motherhood’” (3). While my work also examines the call to cleanliness faced by turn-of-the-century women, I focus on the anti-immigrant ideals of sanitarianism (scientific and literary sanitarianism) and how this interest in racial and spatial purity feeds early environmental conservation movements.
environmental influences on the narrator, I see these influences in terms of bodily contamination, rather than affect. Read through the lens of sanitarianism’s euthenics, contamination flows between body and environment; thus a harmful environment can harm the narrator, but the narrator is also figured as a threat to her environment.

Gilman’s short story illustrates the overwhelming desire to contain threats to the status quo. The narrator plays the role of the infectious agent, as she fails to fulfill her role as a wife and mother. The narrator’s nervous disorder dislocates the conventional family: hers is living in a summer rental for three months, under the guise of improving the narrator’s health. During this time the narrator has been isolated from friends, family, and her newborn baby. In fact, her husband’s sister, Jennie, has taken over the maternal role in this story, performing the narrator’s responsibilities of managing the home, childrearing, and entertaining. It isn’t clear if the narrator is unable, unwilling, or deemed unfit to fulfill her role. Regardless, the abnormality of the narrator causes her doctor/husband, John, to stash her away in the upstairs nursery of their rental home. In accordance with the rest cure of the time, she has been asked to rest and get well. While the movement of this family to a temporary rental home is said to be under the premise of improving the narrator’s health, it also seems to be a method of quarantine, containing the individual who is not fit to circulate in society. As an unfit mother and wife, she is also apparently an unfit citizen, and her disorder needs to be contained so it won’t spread. It helps maintain the appearance of things, so John does not have to explain his wife’s behavior, an act of isolating the disease, so to speak.
The house being used to quarantine the narrator is not exactly a “home.” It is a summer house, a rental, not the traditional space for a family. When the family nears the end of their three months in these “ancestral halls,” the narrator has her “break down,” thus suggesting that perhaps she does not want to go home. She ties herself with a rope, locks the door, and throws away the key, suggesting that she would rather stay put than return home or return to the maternal role she is supposed to fulfill within the home. It is a transitional space, where none of the traditional elements of what makes a house a home are being met. Of course, the meanings of “home” are prolific, referring to a space as vast as one’s country of origin or as small as the walls that construct the house in which one grows up. “Home” further connotes the feelings associated with this space: “The place of one's dwelling or nurturing, with the conditions, circumstances, and feelings that naturally and properly attach to it, and are associated with it,” and “A place, region, or state to which one properly belongs, in which one's affections centre, or where one finds refuge, rest, or satisfaction” (OED 1989). In the context of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” it is evident that the summer house is not really a home yet, since it does not generate feelings of “refuge,” “nurturing,” and “satisfaction,” and the family is far from feeling “properly attached to it.”

According to traditional gender roles, if the mother fulfills her responsibilities in the home, then she facilitates the feeling of attachment between the family and the home. The narrator, however, fails to meet these responsibilities. She writes about her struggles, stating, “It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way! I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden
already! Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able – to
dress and entertain, and order things” (168). Here her desire to bring “rest and comfort” to
John is clearly motivated by her feeling of “duty” to fulfill her responsibilities of wife
and mother. The narrator wants to perform part of her role by redecorating the home, but
John does not allow her to do this, arguing that it would give in to her “fancies” (168).
The narrator also fails to fulfill her responsibilities as a mother, leaving Jennie and the
servant Mary to take care of her newborn baby. If the mother’s role is to cleanse and
protect the child from infectious agents, then the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a
complete failure. She has no contact with her son and no control over the home, her
supposed domain. Her mental “disorder” has caused a departure from the home and
everything it stands for.

Ironically, the narrator seems to need the “temporary paternalism” that
immigrants supposedly need according to Ellen Richards. While it seems strange for
Richards to call a traditionally female role “temporary paternalism,” it makes sense
through the lens of “The Yellow Wallpaper” that temporary paternalism is needed when
mothers run amok. It is the narrator’s maternal failures that create the need for a
temporary home and a temporary father to bring her back to form. Clearly, John
represents this, as the marriage in this text becomes more like a father-daughter
relationship than a husband-wife partnership. John calls his wife child-like names like
his “blessed little goose.” He forces her to stay in the nursery of the rental home and
patronizes her, declaring, “she shall be as sick as she pleases!” (173). His treating the
narrator as a child might not be only a comment on the patriarchal system of marriage in
the nineteenth century and how it subordinated women, but also a comment derived from
the prescription of sanitarianism.

John’s attempts at temporary paternalism are also a failure, however, as the
narrator’s “disease” refuses to stay contained and manifests in the image of the wallpaper.
It appears that the narrator projects her disease outward onto the wallpaper, a process she
describes in her diary. She begins to see “creeping women” everywhere: behind the
wallpaper, but also outside creeping around the garden and the grounds. She describes
what she sees in the wallpaper, writing, “At night in any kind of light, in twilight,
candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside
pattern, I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be” (174). The narrator sees
her “other self,” so to speak, behind the pattern of the wallpaper, an incarcerated soul
trapped behind the arabesque patterns of the wallpaper. The inner self escapes in the end,
suggesting that the narrator’s disorder could not be contained. She declares, “I’ve got out
at last…in spite of you and Jane. And I’ve pulled off most of the paper, so you can’t put
me back” (180). The narrator has developed a kind of split personality here as her
internal self has been freed from her external self. Obviously this upholds Gilman’s
central theme that the nineteenth-century role for women was confining and at times
abusive.

The failure to contain the narrator, however, also demonstrates the anxiety of the
time, not only over women who did not fulfill their female role, or any non-citizen
disrupting the status quo, but also over science and the way germ theory brought the
threat of disease into the home. While miasma theory suggested the idea of contagion,
Germ theory brought the line of defense into the hands of women on the battlefield of the home. Miasma theory identified the more general and mysterious atmosphere as the source of contagion, while germ theory identified a more tangible, although invisible, source of disease in microscopic germs.

Germ theory had far reaching effects. Priscilla Wald argues that this bacteriological transformation, making the invisible visible, affected the work of sociologists like Robert E. Park. “Claiming the ability likewise to identify and track – to identify, in fact, by tracking – the invisible transmission of ideas and attitudes,” Wald argues, “Park, too, could harness that authority as he redefined the material of culture” (“Communicable Americanism” 662). Wald suggests that sociologists saw parallels between transmissible diseases and social interactions, and they applied the language and ideas of germ theory to their work. The new visibility of germ theory thereby generated a kind of optimism and scientific authority to the work of sociology.

Like the sociologist, the sanitarian also benefited from the scientific authority of germ theory; however, sanitarians like Richards and Gilman seem far more riddled with anxiety than Wald’s optimistic sociologist. The sanitarian’s anxiety arose from the fact that germs are not visible to the naked eye. In addition, the sociologist and the sanitarian interpret environment differently. Wald argues that Park saw space as an “expression” of a community, not a participant in the community: “he posits space as a function of process: communication constitutes a community that finds expression in an increasingly distinct social space (for example, the tenement)” (“Communicable Americanism” 656). Finally, she concludes, “places conform to – are constituted by – geographic fictions”
While I agree that places become scripted in the national imaginary, Wald’s analysis of sociology renders space inert, a notion sanitarians and environmentalists did not share.

Reading the yellow wallpaper in “The Yellow Wallpaper” as purely the narrator’s internal projection outward overlooks the historical context of sanitarianism. As Beth Sutton-Ramspeck points out, it is likely that Gilman’s “Yellow Wallpaper” was directly influenced by the sanitary science of the time, which criticized old-fashioned wallpaper as an enemy to the new cleanliness (123-25). Tomes explains the link between Victorian wallpaper and contagion, explaining that “The connection between dust and disease figured prominently in home economists’ criticisms of the overstuffed furniture, thick carpets, patterned wallpaper, and extensive bric-a-brac so beloved in Victorian decorating schemes” (my emphasis 144). Wallpaper was viewed as a “disease-breeding” environment because of the way it could retain dust, and as they used to say “where there was dust, there were germs” (144). In place of wallpaper and other dust-collecting home furnishings, sanitarians promoted a type of decorating “free of ornamentation” to avoid these health traps (144-5). Gilman’s comparison of the wallpaper to a fungus is further evidence that she was influenced by germ theory, as the term “germs” includes fungi, as well as many other microorganisms (Tomes 2). In addition, the color and smell of the paper indicate something that is rotting; she describes the paper as having a “sulphur tint” and a “yellow smell.” This rotting image and harsh smell suggest that the paper contains dangerous contaminants and is spoiling the air.
The narrator’s repeated attempts to study and follow the pattern of the wallpaper, all of which fail, suggest the difficulty of accepting germ theory. The narrator describes these failed attempts at observation: “It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough constantly to provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide – plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions” (167). Germ theory required the understanding that a physical contaminant exists in the wallpaper, but it cannot be seen with the naked eye, no matter how long the narrator stares at it. Sanitarians were calling upon women to become better scientific observers, and the narrator, accordingly, begins to think that Jennie and John are also being negatively affected by the wallpaper, declaring, “It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis, that perhaps it is the paper!” (175). The narrator’s dabbling with a “scientific hypothesis” was something women were now supposed to do in the home.

As discussed earlier, Richards believed that the home should protect one from “dangers from within,” suggesting that external contaminants can be absorbed and internalized. However, in “The Yellow Wallpaper” the home fails to maintain this protective boundary, and the story suggests that microscopic and figurative germs have taken over the nursery. Richards says the home should protect one from “bad habits, bad food, bad air, dirt and abuse, - shelter, in fact, from all stunting agencies” (73). The home is meant to fight off not simply physical contaminants but “bad habits” and “abuse,” problems that apparently can spread like contagious diseases.
Gilman’s symbol of choice, the wallpaper, brings in the idea of contamination being circulated by sanitarians. Such an idea generated tremendous anxiety, as permeable boundaries like the body and the home suddenly seemed susceptible to a dangerous outer environment. While critics often debate over which direction the illness seems to be flowing (inside out or outside in), typically identifying with the former, it is the portal between the outside and inside of the narrator that is so fascinating. Indeed, the boundary between her internal self and the external world is porous, as contaminants shuttle back and forth through some invisible process, like osmosis. The lack of impermeable borders between inside and out puts everything at stake, as both the purity of the environment and the purity of the individual are threatened. Such diffusion between inside and out creates not only anxiety and a drive to contain, but also the drive to sanitize bloodlines and spaces, since such diffusion cannot be stopped.

II. Sanitarianism in Herland

The infectious relationship between space and race seen in Euthenics and the dangerous open border between body and environment seen in “The Yellow Wallpaper” come together in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Herland, published in 1915. There has been a lot of critical attention to the way Gilman’s female utopia adheres to the rules of eugenics. For example, Dana Seitler’s “Unnatural Selection” argues that Gilman ascribes to the theory of eugenics because “Eugenics became a mode through which (white) women’s social significance could be restructured” (69). While eugenics may be a source of power for the women of Herland, reading this text only through a feminist lens overlooks the environmental and national issues it contains. Gilman’s interest in
eugenics exposes her captivation with purity and contamination. Eugenics is a way to achieve racial purity, but in *Herland* its achievement goes hand in hand with environmental purification, exposing a symbiotic relationship between body and space that has been expanded since her earlier work. Unlike “The Yellow Wallpaper” where sickness and contamination need to be contained, both the environment and the women of *Herland* are the epitome of “purity”; they are perfect extensions of one another. In this utopia where both the environment and inhabitants are “pure,” the borders between the individual, nation, and environment disappear, as the three comprise one “pure” entity.

While “The Yellow Wallpaper” fights contamination, *Herland*, as a utopia, is not about the struggle to achieve sanitarianism; rather, this purification has already been accomplished. With the appearance of both a clean environment and a clean race in this text, one should also notice the complete lack of anxiety in the Herlander women. The narrator repeatedly remarks at the level-headed personalities of the women, who seem practically incapable of anxiety or overreaction. Van comments, “They had the evenest tempers, the most perfect patience and good nature – one of the things most impressive about them all was the absence of irritability” (48). Upon their first encounter with the men, the women treat them as a potential threat, but the Herlanders remain calm and methodical about their treatment of the three men. The women isolate them as a precaution, but they do not fear the men as infectious agents, because Herland has already achieved the highest level of controllable environment, or euthenics. Thus, having spent so much time in this disease-free, peaceful nation, the Herlanders do not fear the foreign men as disease carriers.
While this kind of approach to foreigners seems to reverse the xenophobia of sanitarianism, the core methods of eugenics remain evident in *Herland*. The Herlanders’ “pure” bloodlines and the ways in which they achieve “civilization” combine to make them acceptable to Gilman’s audience, and their purity and civilization — their complete sanitarianism — is tied to their treatment and control of nature. In *Herland*, everything is contained: the size of the population, their genetic makeup and sexuality, the landscape, food supply, animals, diseases, social behaviors, etc. There is no wild nature in this text, except perhaps in the three men who arrive unannounced one day. And to the degree that men represent a potentially contaminating “wildness,” they are environmentally contained by the Herland women. The Herlanders do not exhibit the xenophobia of Richards’ *Euthenics*, but they do display the methodical practices of sanitarianism, with its emphasis on cleaning, containment, education, and motherhood. Geography, architecture, and supervision provide the technologies of containment. The women isolate the men in a fortress on a high cliff and keep them under constant surveillance. While captives of Herland, the men are not treated poorly, but are fed, clothed, educated, and allowed to roam in the fortress and garden. However, they lack the freedom to do as they please and are not allowed to circulate freely. A general fear of the unknown and risk of potential violence generates mistrust of the men; they are neither treated as hostile contaminants, nor trusted. One of their teachers explains that the men are under tight watch because “If, by any accident, you did harm any one of us, you would have to face a million mothers,” implying that the women would use violence if necessary (67). However, as the Herlanders educate the men, the latter gain freedom. In many ways their
treatment seems consistent with sanitarianism, with its focus on containment and education. A “temporary paternalism,” resembling paternalism just as it did in *Euthenics*, trains the foreigners, so they will eventually be able to circulate in this society.

Unsurprisingly, the foreign status of the men equates them with savagery. While Van and Jeff seem content with their “peculiar imprisonment,” Terry is not and eventually convinces the trio to break out. Van explains how the men get to their flying machine: “stealing along among the rocks and trees like so many creeping savages, we came to that flat space where we had landed; and there, in unbelievable good fortune, we found our machine” (my emphasis 41). Ironically, the men feel like savages and the women are cast as civilized, inverting the men’s original expectations of the women (and perhaps the reader’s expectations too). Gilman uses the term “creeping” to evoke primal and desperate behavior; just like the narrator of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” the men search to escape the bounds of this world. Their attempt fails, however, when the women foil their get-away, and the men are once again placed in confinement.

The Herlanders take their sanitary methods of containment seriously, as is evident when Terry is eventually banished from the community for his violent sexual advances against Alima. His savage behavior and apparent lack of trainability result in his expulsion. Herland exiles Terry because his hyper-masculinity is too threatening. His banishment allows Herland to maintain the status quo, containing masculinity and the women’s sexuality. Janet Beer explains that Terry’s exile “maintains the body of the female state in a condition free from danger. This is articulated in the text as

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44 “Peculiar Imprisonment” is the third chapter title of *Herland.*
infection…and expelling the infection in the shape of Terry is the means by which they
maintain the nation’s health” (66-67). They sustain their health through sanitarianism,
which requires the complete cleansing of body and space.

In fact, this kind of cleansing is a matter of national security, requiring all of the
Herland women to carry out border patrol, like Ellen Richards’ *Euthenics* prescribes.
Van finds out that the entire community awaited the trio’s attempted escape, watching
their every move as they tried to find their plane. This is an example of *Herland*
executing the mantra of national surveillance devised by sanitarianism. The immediate
Herland environment is no longer threatening, because the women have complete control
over it, or so it seems. The novel ends with Van and Ellador leaving for America. After
discussions about creating a pathway between Herland and the outside world, the high
council asks Van to conceal their location from the rest of the world. Based on the
prevalence of contagious disease, the violence, ignorance, and prejudice in the outside
world, the women decide that they are “unwilling to expose our country to free
communication with the rest of the world” (145). This final refusal to open up Herland to
“exposure” is the novel’s final act of containment. Wald, Tomes, and Lynch argue,
“Cultural margins and national borders are often summoned, if not articulated, through
the figure of specific contagious diseases” (619). Following suit, the Herlanders maintain
the integrity of their nation through sanitarian methods, which fight against the
potentially dangerous contagions that shuttle between body and space.

Although dangerous contaminants must be kept out of Herland by establishing
strict borders, within the nation the women have developed a certain porousness between
body and space. The Herland civilization is truly based on community rather than individualism, evident in its social structure and architecture. When Van first sees the country he remarks,

   But this place! It was built mostly of a sort of dull rose-colored stone, with here and there some clear white houses; and it lay abroad among the green groves and gardens like a broken rosary of pink coral. ‘Those big white ones are public buildings evidently,’ Terry declared… ‘Plenty of palaces, but where are the homes?’ ‘Oh there are little ones enough – but -.’ It certainly was different from any towns we had ever seen. (20-1)

The layout and structure of the town is not like anything the men have ever seen before: the houses are “clear” and “white,” suggesting the community aesthetic is based on sanitation and purity. The buildings and their natural environments seem built together in perfect harmony, as the houses are also arranged amongst “green groves” and “gardens.”

While impressed by the architecture of Herland, however, the men struggle to assess if it achieves the qualities of “home” or not. As Terry comments in the passage above, “‘Plenty of palaces, but where are the homes?’ ‘Oh there are little ones enough – but -.’” The fragmentary ending of this statement displays his uncertainty. The general layout of the space suggests that there are not a lot of houses, at least not compared to Western standards, but there are many public buildings. There is something about Herland that is home-like, but then again, there seems to be something lacking. Van explains, “They had no exact analogue for our word home, any more than they had for our Roman-based family” (95). For the women of Herland, this place does achieve the definition of home; it is a nurturing refuge and the women are attached to it. However, the Western idea of home and family is highly individualist compared to the community based concept of Herland. Gilman herself found the traditional concept of home a
stifling construct for women and their families. The men think of home as a single family unit with a patriarch directing the family’s goals and decisions.

The women of Herland, in contrast, are driven by the goals of the entire community. For Richards, the home synecdochally represents the nation, but for Herland the home is the nation. As a microcosm of the nation (Richards’ idea), the home has to do constant border control to protect itself from the outside, but in Herland, individuals do not have to protect themselves from other community members or from their immediate environment. They only need protection from the outer world, which their geographical borders supply. Herland erases the protective border that surrounds the nuclear family; in wiping out the borders of the home, extending them outward to encompass the entire nation, the battle between inside and out, human and environment, no longer seems contested within this utopia.

Turning a national public into a sanitary home, Gilman’s text is practically a manifestation of Richards’ desire to motivate mothers to cleanse their environment for the sake of their children and their race. For instance, Moadine says to Terry, “The children in this country are the one center and focus of all our thoughts. Every step of our advance is always considered in its effect on them – on the race. You see, we are Mothers” (67). Their motivation is always for the future of the nation, as the community is more important than the individual in Herland. Richards’ Euthenics, in a similar

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45 Gilman’s critique of the home is evident across her writing. For more information on her idea of the home and its need for reform, see Marie T. Farr’s “Home is Where the Heart is – or is it? Three Women and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s Theory of the Home.”

46 Barbara Welter explains that in the nineteenth-century cult of True Womanhood “an American woman best shows her patriotism by staying at home” (64). This association between motherhood and nationalism
fashion, is concerned with the collective community over the individual at all costs, suggesting that the individual may have to give up certain things for the good of the whole. Richards’ and Gilman’s concern for community is genuine, but these texts also show that the idea of one unified community generated anxiety in the American public; not everyone that entered the country was “desirable,” according to Richards’ and Gilman’s preconceived ideas about race and contamination.

Gilman, like Richards, also suggests that environment affects the psyche. *Herland* character Jeff suggests that moral degeneracy and environmental decay go hand in hand. When describing his home, he remarks, “‘Why should I want to go back to all our noise and dirt, our vice and crime, our disease and degeneracy?’” (135). Here, his discussion of external pollutants lapses into moral decay (“vice and crime”), and finally this contamination arises in the form of physical “disease” and moral “degeneracy.” Once again these pollutants have been internalized, as “noise and dirt” catalyze bad behavior and physical ailments. At this point in the text, it appears that Jeff’s Herland education has been completed, as he applies the parallels between environmental and human contamination to his home life.

III. *Herland*: Where Sanitarianism Meets Conservationism

Gilman depicts the environmental purity of Herland through landscape: the Herlander environment is practically a model of green urban planning. Van describes the surroundings: “Everything was beauty, order, perfect cleanliness, and the pleasantest sense

is evident in Gilman’s utopia, but unlike True Womanhood’s isolated nuclear family, Gilman breaks these traditional parameters. In this all female nation, all of the Herlanders are mothers and citizens. The figurative and material walls of the “home” have been lifted, as the community of Herland raises the children of the nation.
of home over it all” (21). The space is park-like in every respect, and the Herlanders manage their environment so it will yield a world that is aesthetically pleasing and full of natural resources that the women need to survive. *Herland* displays the sanitarianism of Richards’ work in its approach to cleanliness and racial purity, but it also takes the environmental vision a step farther, for this utopia demonstrates environmental principles like pollution control, sustainable agriculture, and population control, thus illustrating how early environmentalism and the desire for a pure American race were, for some authors, tightly bound.

The Herlanders practice conservationism in order to sustain their existence. In “Gender and Industry in *Herland*” Alex Shishin remarks, “though in certain respects Gilman was a scientific reactionary, she was at the same time ahead of her era in making *Herland* a ‘green’ utopian novel, embracing what would subsequently be called the Conservation Ethic and which evolved into the current ecological consciousness” (111). The conservation ethic favors sustainability, taking care of nature in order to maintain the human race. Conservationism slightly differs from Preservationism; the latter supports the protection of nature based on the idea that nature has a value in itself (Kline 59). The Herlanders go to extreme measures to maintain their living standards in an isolated environment with limited space, where sustainable agriculture is not only preferred but essential to their survival. Shishin concurs that the Herlanders’ forestry practices are presented as an ecological necessity in the text, due to their geographic limitations on an isolated mountain top (Shishin 105). Indeed, their methods are derived from the desire to
maintain their civilization, rather than out of their love for nature, thus mimicking the conservation ethic.

Herland’s lack of pollution attests to their conservationism. The three male visitors remark on the lack of pollutants, stating that there is “no dirt,” “no smoke,” and “no noise” (21). It is significant that the first material clue to Herland’s existence is the textile and colored water the men find, which they read as a definitive sign of “civilization” (6-7). It should not be overlooked that the mark of civilization is not simply the well-constructed cloth, but also the polluted water. In fact, the entire story hinges on this discovery, for the men return to this area on their private expedition based solely on this evidence. Notice that the only pollution the reader sees is outside of Herland’s geographical borders. While this demonstrates that the Herlanders are not great environmentalists in a preservationist sense, they do have a conservationist impulse: they manage their natural environment in order to maintain their own existence. This illustrates Gilman’s environmental awareness, and by displacing pollutants outside of Herland, it maintains Gilman’s green utopic vision of purity by making pollution obsolete within Herland’s borders.

In addition, the polluted water and the presence of industry mark their culture as civilized. Van remarks, “If they’ve got motors, they are civilized,” and they do indeed have motors (31). Civilizations require infrastructure, and the women have this too. After seeing the country from his biplane, Van comments, “There were cities, too; that I insisted. It looked – well, it looked like any other country – a civilized one, I mean” (12). The men struggle most with the way gender participates in civilization. Early on after
seeing their technological advances, Van states, “why, this is a civilized country!” I protested. “There must be men” (13). Gilman attempts to undercut the assumption that only men can create a civilized community. To do so, however, she must maintain many of the traditional requirements of “civilization,” including the need to control the bodies of the citizenry and their natural surroundings.

This control over bodies and space is best exemplified by the Herlander practice of population control. Catalyzed by their space limitations, this nation began to overpopulate. Van characterizes the Herlanders’ dilemma, explaining that as their population rose, their living standards declined (Gilman 69). They developed “negative eugenics” in response to this problem, requiring some women to resist procreating for the good of the community (70). Apparently, the Herland women can choose to resist the “child-longing” when they begin to feel it, replacing that desire with the joy of raising other Herland children and thereby undoing their parthenogenic powers. After controlling the population, however, Herland then attempts to improve the quality of its inhabitants, a process that would require undesirable women to choose not to procreate. Like Ellen Richards’ prescription for both eugenics and eugenics, the Herlanders “train out” and “breed out” problems (83). They enact the latter practice by “appealing” to the undesirables to resist reproducing. This process of appealing to the undesirables to choose not to procreate resembles Richards’ eugenics, which asks foreigners to submit to the power of nature in order to gain control over it. In Gilman’s case, the undesirable Herland women are asked to submit to the will of the community, and they do so by taking control over their thoughts in order to control their bodies. If this does not work
and an undesirable woman procreates anyway, they make sure the child is raised by the most able caregivers or “educators,” as they would call them, which may not necessarily be the child’s biological mother (83).

This interest in racial purity is not that surprising considering the Herlanders’ past. Before an environmental catastrophe catalyzed the inception of the all-female state, the community was a slave holding community. In fact, after the great volcano filled up the pass between this mountain village and the sea, severing and killing their male army stationed below the mountain, slaves revolted and took over the nation. The women rose up and conquered the slaves, displaying the text’s belief in racial superiority. The narrator remarks, “there is no doubt in my mind that these people were of Aryan stock, and were once in contact with the best civilization in the old world” (55). As evident from this passage, not only are the Herlanders interested in eugenics, but the men also seem interested in racial superiority. As Van describes the Herlanders’ race, he reveals his own racial preferences, demonstrating that the men have brought ideas of racial superiority with them to this place, ideas that are affirmed by their visit. Once again, Herland achieves the idea of “civilization” esteemed by the men by maintaining a sense of racial superiority.

Of course, Gilman deviates from the patriarchal ideal of “civilization” through her portrayal of motherhood, which is the mode of citizenship in this fictional country. Gilman writes, “They loved their country because it was their nursery, playground, and workshop – theirs and their children’s” (95). This spatial freedom contrasts “The Yellow Wallpaper,” where the nursery is a site of containment. In Herland, the land belongs to
all, but in turn, each child and each mother’s womb belongs to the group. Thus, Gilman does not replicate Richards’ synecdoche, where the home represents the nation; rather, she selects a new part to represent the whole of the nation: the female body. The physical borders of houses are irrelevant in this socialist community, as body and space are practically continuous entities. Geographical borders, in contrast, create and maintain Herland’s national integrity.

As conservationists, the Herlanders save themselves by conducting complete control over their natural environment, and they match this environmental control with genetic mastery. Gilman writes, “They were a clean-bred, vigorous lot, having the best of care, the most perfect living conditions always” (72-3). Even with their abounding health, however, the men find the women unemotional and detached. Van complains about the way his wife Alima thinks only about the collective group rather than herself, or their relationship: “‘We’ and ‘we’ and ‘we’ – it was so hard to get her to be personal” (126). The three men approach life from the tradition of radical individualism, but the women think collectively. These contradictory views lead to troubled marriages between Van and Ellador and Jeff and Celis. Van writes, “It was not that they did not love us; they did, deeply and warmly. But there you are again – what they meant by ‘love’ and what we meant by ‘love’ were so different” (122). This cultural difference has interesting parallels with environmentalism, as Gilman juxtaposes the Herlanders’ collective conservationism against the individualism of the men.

The socialism of Herland seems to drive their environmental conservationism, while the male individualism in the text seems aligned with environmental
preservationism. John Muir’s preservationism is about the past, while conservationism concerns itself with the present and the future. When Van asks Ellador, “Have you no respect for the past?” she responds, “Why, no…Why should we? They are all gone. They knew less than we do” (112). Ellador refers to the women of Herland who have preceded her, and she holds no reverence for them or their ways. Rather, the Herlanders think only of the future of the nation, and this affects the way they treat their environment: they have converted it into a nurturing environment, but they do not worship it as something pristine and unchanging that should be revered and preserved to its original state.

The environmental conservationism of *Herland* is intertwined with sanitarianism, as purity of the body, the home, and the nation function concurrently. Richards and Gilman demonstrate sanitarianism as a method of purification fed by nineteenth-century science, a cultural history of racism, and the national desire for a pure America. In addition, these texts illustrate how American women were being called upon to patrol the home; as leaders of a domestic space, they were to cleanse the home of the undesirable in order to perpetuate an unadulterated space to nourish the youth of America. This connection between the purity of Americans and their environment manifests itself in the rise of sanitary science and conservationism. Sanitarianism tries to purify those spaces that have been “contaminated” by rapid urban development and immigration. Above all these texts illustrate that as Americans began to understand the basic concept of ecology – that humans and their environment are interconnected – profound anxiety arose in an
attempt to clean and secure boundaries: boundaries of the home, the body, and the nation, as infectious agents threatened to obliterate these borders.
CHAPTER FOUR
‘HOW CAN I GROW PURE?’: DOMESTIC PRESERVATIONISM IN MUIR,
CATHER, AND DU BOIS

In the early twentieth century, environmental preservation and sanitary science shared a common goal: pure, symbolic national habitat. While approaching this goal from different angles, they share a nationalist and, at times, nativist agenda, as they attempt to contain the “pure” from the “impure,” a division that often took the form of the color line. While the idea of purity mutually constructed through race and space can be a tool for oppression, some authors found the porosity between body and space to have subversive potential. In Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* and W.E.B. Du Bois’s *The Quest of the Silver Fleece*, the children of immigrants in the former text and the children of slaves in the latter try to assimilate into American culture through dwelling in, loving, and working nature, and as they transform nature from unusable wilderness to a productive farm and cotton field, they assimilate into American culture. As these texts demonstrate, a sanitized and domestic version of environmental preservation makes nature into a bridge to American identity.47

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47 Some may find a “sanitized and domestic” form of preservationism to be a contradiction in terms since preservation focuses on wild, exterior environments and is typically gendered masculine, while sanitization and domesticity is associated with the interior, feminine space of the home. However, as I examine the intersections between sanitarianism and preservationism during the early twentieth century, it will become clear that these two movements shared many of the same goals and the same rhetoric.
Environmental preservation, however, has a reputation for being elitist and racist. As William Cronon points out, “Wilderness suddenly emerged as the landscape of choice for elite tourists,....For them, wild land was not a site for productive labor and not a permanent home; rather, it was a place of recreation. One went to the wilderness not as a producer but as a consumer” (78). Similarly, Bruce Braun’s examination of race and outdoor adventure in contemporary “risk culture,” argues persuasively that “in risk culture the ‘black adventurer’ has no proper place” (195). In many respects, both of these arguments are valid. A recreational form of nature was not easily accessible to those who live in the margins. If one does not have the time or ability to take one’s leisure in the wilderness, then how can one access its purifying potential?

However, women, people of color, and the poor were not completely outside the realm of twentieth-century environmentalism, even though history suggests otherwise. Cather and Du Bois suggest that some of the principles of preserverationism were accessible and advantageous to marginalized characters, even if wilderness was not accessible to them as a form of recreation. Because space and race are mutually constructed, the children of immigrants and of slaves in these texts turn to the marginalized spaces with which they are associated – a swamp and a wild prairie – and by performing as sanitary agents themselves, transform these environments. Picking up on the nationalist rhetoric of preservationism and sanitarianism and working within the literary genre of regionalism, Du Bois and Cather suggest that by sanitizing unwanted spaces, racialized characters can “grow pure” and assimilate. The techniques of sanitizing the outside world, however, are not dusting and sweeping, but rather the
techniques of preservation, loving and dwelling in nature, and transforming it into a sanitized, productive space.

Traditionally, our history and criticism do not put the ideas of literature, race, nationalism, sanitarianism, and environmentalism in the same conversation. Only a handful of critics have pointed to the historical intersections of environmentalism, sanitarianism, and nativism in the early twentieth century. Donna Haraway’s “Teddy Bear Patriarchy” explores the intersections between “exhibition, eugenics, and conservation” in natural history museums in the early twentieth century. She argues that these three endeavors “attempted to insure preservation without fixation and paralysis, in the face of extraordinary change in the relations of sex, race, and class” (55). Similarly, David Mazel explores these intersecting ideas, but in a different medium. He confirms the historical simultaneity between ecology, sanitarianism, and literary regionalism. He remarks that both regionalism and ecology paradoxically lend themselves to “illuminating the complex relations between culture and place. But that same attention always entails the risk of degenerating into the sort of environmental determinism that has so often underwritten dehumanizing theories of racial difference and national superiority” (129-30). Thus, some critics have begun to fill in the historical gap that

48 For example, Michael Kowalewski’s “Bioregional Perspectives in American Literature” examines how literary regionalism often contains the environmental characteristics of bioregionalism, a localized environmentalism that suggests “Individuals and communities…come into consciousness through, not apart from, the natural environments they inhabit” (30). Regarding race and the preservation movement, Ivan Grabovac’s presentation “Nature and Nativism: The ‘Racial Soul’ of the American Preservation Movement” argues that African-Americans participated in environmental preservationism, filling in a historical gap which suggests otherwise.

49 Similarly, Lawrence Buell suggests, “a hegemonic practice of environmental representation can present itself to another subculture either as a roadblock…or as an opportunity” (Environmental Imagination 18-19). While in the last chapter I explored how sanitarianian and conservatist ideology attempts to contain
problematically severs environmentalism, sanitarianism, national production, and literature. However, very little work has been done on the ways literature reflects and produces the ideology of these movements and the consequences of such production.

In contrast, the connection between literary regionalism and nationalism has received a lot of critical attention. Elizabeth Ammons and Valerie Rohy explain how the region becomes representative of the nation in local color fiction. They write, “The synecdochical relation implies a certain assimilation; like local color itself, it involves not only the recognition of difference but also the incorporation of the other, not only the celebration of regional difference but also the promotion of a nationalist fantasy” (xxv-xxvi). In other words, the text and the region it represents are a representative part of the whole nation. Taken as synecdoches, these regional texts imply that the pieces can assimilate into the whole.

and sanitize the other for the sake of a unified, “pure” national identity, in this chapter I will explore how preservationism provides an “opportunity” for the marginalized other to assimilate into American culture.

50 This gap seems to result from disciplinary boundaries, which separate the study of literature from the biological sciences, as well as from environmental history. Even within the study of environmental politics, the environmental movement’s origins and connections to sanitarianism and the home economics movement are often missed. This gap could be a matter of gender bias, as the latter movements were primarily led and conducted by women, while the institutionalization of environmentalism was decidedly masculine through the work and writings of Teddy Roosevelt, Gifford Pinchot, and John Muir.

51 I should note that “local color” and “regionalism” are genres that some critics differentiate between and others conflate. In “Reading Regionalism,” Marjorie Pryse argues that there is a distinct difference between the two: “the distinction between literary regionalism, which features an empathic approach to regional characters that enfranchises their stories and cultural perceptions, and ‘local color,’ which represents regional life and regional characters as objects to be viewed from the perspective of the nonregional, often urban Eastern reader, and frequently offered for that reader’s entertainment” (48). While Pryse differentiates between the two, Ammons and Rohy do not seem to be making the same distinction, since they suggest that local color can “enfranchise” marginalized people. I will be adhering to Pryse’s definition; both Cather and Du Bois’s texts adhere to her definition of regionalism.
But what if the region being represented is “undesirable”? How could an author like Du Bois, who is representing a troubled South during reconstruction, make the undesirable desirable? In most regional texts, the value given to people is equaled by the value of their environment; one is an expression of the other. Therefore, making a given environment valuable in the eyes of the nation makes the people of that environment valuable. This is not accomplished simply by representing marginalized persons or spaces in a text (as Ammons and Rohy suggest), but by ascribing to the values of sanitarianism and preservation. In *Quest of the Silver Fleece* and *O Pioneers!*, marginalized characters assimilate through loving and dwelling in nature, in concordance with preservationism, purifying nature and themselves. As these characters transform the environment through love and work, they recalibrate their own value via nature, demonstrating the mutual constructions of space and race.\(^{52}\)

\(^{52}\) However, while both texts are ecocentric, neither is overtly environmental. Obviously, the transformation of wild nature into a commodity can be problematic from an environmental perspective, and I would not call Cather or Du Bois “preservationists” because neither author writes with an environmental agenda in mind. They do not meet the main criteria of environmental preservationists, who claim that nature should be protected in its wild state because nature has innate value. Cather and Du Bois ascribe to the two preservationist principles of love and dwelling; however, these axioms only take them so far. Unable to dwell in nature as a form of recreation, as seen in Muir, these marginalized characters must work in nature. The relationship between labor and environmentalism has always been a troubled one. As Richard White explains in his “‘Are You an Environmentalist or Do You Work for a Living?’: Work and Nature,” environmentalists tend to interpret labor in nature as a form of destruction (171). White argues that environmentalists must find a place for work within the realm of environmentalism in order to break down the imaginary borders between nature and culture. I would add that by ignoring work in nature environmentalists alienate the stories and experiences of many marginalized individuals, particularly African American slaves. It is possible to read Du Bois and Cather’s agrarian model as fixing the problem that White points toward. However, White warns that this agrarian model can also be dangerous because it “is apt to sentimentalize certain kinds of farming and argue that work on the land creates a connection to place that will protect nature itself” (171). White concludes that connecting to place will not necessarily result in the protection of nature. I agree with this conclusion, and it is evident in Du Bois and Cather’s texts, for while the main characters connect to nature through labor, in the end these texts do not advocate for the protection of nature.
I. ‘Going to the mountains is going home’: John Muir’s Domestic Preservationism

By the time *Quest* and *O Pioneers!* were published, 1911 and 1913 respectively, debates over conservation abounded in the public realm. Environmental issues were prominent because of the Forest Reserve Act of 1891, which allowed the federal government to protect and preserve lands in the West for future use. The shift from President Teddy Roosevelt to President Taft caused turmoil in 1909, as conservationists from Roosevelt’s administration ran into problems with Taft’s. Joseph Urgo explains, “conservation became the subject of national debate, pitting the utilitarians, those who wanted to reserve land for subsequent, profitable use, against the preservationists, who were more anxious to preserve natural resources for aesthetic, recreational, and spiritual reasons” (1). As Urgo points out, the utilitarian versus preservationist debate was essentially the dispute between Gifford Pinchot and John Muir.

Pinchot believed in conservation as a means of maintaining the greatest good for the greatest number of people, while preservationists like John Muir took a more romantic approach to land management, wishing to preserve and restore the natural landscape to a state of original beauty. In “Our National Parks,” John Muir, “Thousands of tired, nerve-shaken, over-civilized people are beginning to find out that going to the mountains is going home; that wildness is a necessity; and that mountain parks and reservations are useful not only as fountains of timber and irrigating rivers, but as fountains of life” (my emphasis, 1). Here, Muir’s desire to protect wilderness is based on spiritual and aesthetic purposes rather than functional principles. While home is typically identified with an interior space, Muir finds “home” in the outdoors. Sanitarians
suggested that the home should fend off outside contaminants. Muir maintains this maxim, but inverts inside and outside, human and natural environments, suggesting that nature is a “pure” home needing protection against human contaminants, rather than that human homes need protection against “natural” contaminants.

While Muir is known for masculine adventure-driven stories about his experiences in the wilderness, here he aligns “going to the mountains” with “home,” a parallel that domesticates the wild. This domestication ameliorates the fear over wilderness, making it more palatable to the public, which is necessary in order to sell his agenda and make American society believe that “wildness is a necessity.” “Going to the mountains” in the form of a national park is recreation, but Muir doesn’t sell it as such. In attempting to give this retreat from society more weight, he casts nature as a place for spiritual rejuvenation.

For Muir, this kind of spirituality does not occur passively; it requires two things: love and dwelling. These two actions extend his metaphor of the mountains as home, continuing his domestication of wilderness. Muir writes,

On the way to Yosemite Valley, you get some grand views over the forests of the Merced and Tuolumne basins and glimpses of some of the finest trees by the roadside without leaving your seat in the stage. But to learn how they live and behave in pure wildness,…—for this you must love them and live with them, as

53 Regarding Muir’s evocation of home, Braun argues, “That wilderness can be considered men’s true home alerts us to the workings of a different binary – domesticated/wild – in which the ‘domesticated’ home (the frontier, the place of one’s wife) is contrasted with a ‘true’ home (wilderness, the mistress who excites and whom one masters) (194). In contrast, by considering the intersecting ideologies of sanitarism and environmentalism, I see Muir’s use of home not as the “true,” masculine, wild home that Braun sees, but rather the attempt to make his environmental agenda accessible to the broad public and ameliorate a seemingly scary entity like wilderness with a language the public understood, domesticity. Sanitary science, after all, was education reform, and its methods were disseminated effectively through various venues, including women’s clubs, lectures, magazines and newspapers, and public education programs offered through state university extension programs (Tomes).
free from schemes and cares and time as the trees themselves. (my emphasis, 101-2)

While one can see nature from one’s “seat in the stage,” a true understanding of nature, as well as access to its spiritual potential, can come only through love. In this passage, understanding comes from loving nature and dwelling in its midst in a kind of timeless state like the trees – “free from schemes and cares and time as the trees themselves.”

Furthermore, according to Stephen Fox’s assessment of Muir, “love of nature demanded the rejection of a mechanistic, godless universe” and it “could not be loved passively or admired vicariously like a painting. Real appreciation required full immersion, engaging the whole body, leading finally to an urgency to protect the wilderness from ‘progress’” (118). This active dwelling in nature could arrest time, replenish the soul, and hopefully motivate environmental protection.

In practice, this desire for timelessness led to what Robert Gottlieb calls “monumentalism” (29). Preservationists argued in favor of putting wilderness areas aside as national monuments. For example, in regards to Yellowstone National Park, Gottlieb writes, “The conception of the park as a cultural monument further reinforced the notion that preservation was specifically not about protecting living environments subject to the land uses and activities of organized societies, but rather about safeguarding cultural artifacts” (27). Therefore, preservationism is only partially about protecting the environment. It is also about protecting our cultural values and history, maintaining the environment in a certain material state.

By 1916, the original leader of the National Park Service, Stephen Mather, marketed the national parks as recreational and restorative. Gottlieb argues, “To promote
the parks, Mather also understood that the long-standing nationalist appeal about cultural monuments, such as the railroads’ promotional slogan of ‘See America First,’ had to be integrated into a broader appeal of experiencing nature. This ‘back to nature’ appeal was part nostalgia and part therapy, an arcadian myth in an increasingly urbanized and industrial society” (31). Muir’s notion of nature as a “home” makes sense in this paradigm. Visiting the national parks became a kind of collective homecoming; they were meant to connect one to the past, the nation’s past as well as the environment’s.

The political and economic success of transforming particular environments into “cultural artifacts” was accomplished through the rhetoric of nationalism. Mazel argues, “Intellectuals from Hector St. Jean de Crevecoeur to Frederick Jackson Turner encouraged Americans to imagine themselves as deriving their ‘Americanness’ from their continuing contact with the frontier – a habit which gave ecology a patriotic basis and helped prompt its institutionalization in the form of national parks, whose creation was motivated as much by nationalism as by what we today think of as environmentalism” (131). Obviously, being able to transform such spaces into national symbols helped sell the environmental platform.

There is a perceived cleanliness and purity attached to national parks. While often overlooked, environmentalists like Muir were influenced by sanitary science. Muir’s work contains an anti-urban position. Gottlieb writes, “Muir distinguished between the urban ‘lowland’ and the wilderness high ground, which provided a kind of spiritual replenishment for daily life. Returning to Yosemite after a visit to San Francisco, Muir wrote how he experienced his own physical regeneration in the
wilderness, ‘sufficient to shake out and clear away every trace of lowland confusion, degeneration and dust’” (30). The language Muir uses, particularly his reference to “degeneration and dust,” draws upon sanitarians like Ellen Richards. Muir associates an agent of filth, “dust,” with mental “degeneration,” spatially configured in the “lowland” of San Francisco. With the simultaneous rise of environmentalism and sanitary science, both institutionalized through national rhetoric, it is not surprising that the language of sanitarianism pops up in Muir. This means that not all environments were valuable and “pure” according to the preservationist.

However, sanitarianism suggests that spatial purity in the home can be achieved through cleansing. While Muir juxtaposes home and wilderness, cleansing the wild, he figuratively, and perhaps unintentionally, brings a recreational space into the realm of labor. Home means different things to different people. Muir was putting forth the concept of wilderness as home in order to promote restoration through recreation, but the home is not a retreat for everyone. For many, women and domestic servants in particular, the home is a site of labor. The intersecting methodologies of sanitarianism and preservationism create alternative possibilities for marginalized persons. While women, African Americans, and immigrants of the early twentieth century might not have had the opportunity for recreation in the mountains, many did have access to the domestic sphere (house cleaning) and the opportunity to work in nature (agriculture). By mixing methodologies put forth by preservationism and sanitarianism, including the former’s emphasis on loving and dwelling in nature and the latter’s emphasis on cleansing, Cather
and Du Bois suggest that this labor might be capable of purifying unwanted environments and by doing so, purifying the agent of environmental transformation.

II. Bath Tubs and ‘symmetrical pasture ponds’: Sanitarianism and Preservationism in Cather’s *O Pioneers!*

Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!* shifts the balance between background (the setting or landscape) and foreground (characters or plot), making the background more prominent than it typically is in literature.\(^54\) This text places people deeply in the landscape, making character a product of dwelling in nature. Cather’s *O Pioneers!* preserves nature and an agricultural, rural way of life by memorializing pioneer life. This text displays immigrant assimilation through dwelling and the transformation of wilderness into tame, productive farm land. Cather intertwines a love of and a desire to sanitize nature (in immigrant bodies and in the land), leading to an environment “worthy” of preservation (textual preservation). The agents of this sanitization and land transformation in turn become “worthy” of American identity.

While sanitarianism was mostly geared toward immigrants living in urban areas, *O Pioneers!* demonstrates that its concepts of bodily purification reached well beyond the city. The text repeatedly alludes to bath tubs in the Nebraska prairie, and by part II of the text, the bath tub seems to be both a novelty and a status symbol. This new technology

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\(^54\) This trope appears in other regionalist texts, like Sarah Orne Jewett’s *The Country of the Pointed Firs*. In *A Sense of Things*, Bill Brown refers to Kenneth Burke’s “scene-agent ratio” to describe this phenomenon. Brown suggests that the emphasis on scene represents the influence of anthropology on regionalism. He emphasizes the importance of *things* in the late nineteenth century, suggesting that *things* bring people and places together, and things become artifacts representative of the connection between people and place in a modern world where people and things are often displaced from the scene of their original connection (133-5). Brown’s analysis of anthropology and regionalism is illuminating, but it does not recognize the environmental debates surrounding these texts at the time that also influenced the shift to a more place based literature.
for bathing seems capable of sanitizing far more than a little Nebraska dirt. The topic of cleanliness comes up after the outcast of the story, Crazy Ivar, tells Alexandra about his fears of being put in an asylum. He tells her, “That is the way; they have built the asylum for people who are different and they will not even let us live in the holes with the badgers” (63). Nature, in the form of badger holes, is at risk of contamination here, while an asylum becomes a containment facility for those who are “different.” This passage suggests that the badger holes are clean and pure, while Ivar is an infectious agent that needs to be contained. Alexandra assures Ivar that she needs him on the farm, and she will protect him. He responds by trying to demonstrate his willingness to follow her rules, which include washing his feet every night, as she requested (64). Again, she tries to comfort him, saying, “We can remember when half our neighbors went barefoot in summer. I expect old Mrs. Lee would love to slip her shoes off now sometimes, if she dared” (64). Being barefoot is aligned with old world customs. Like Ivar, Mrs. Lee’s old country ways are not welcomed by Lou (Alexandra’s brother) or his wife Annie. Significantly, Lou owns a bath tub. Ivar tells Alexandra that Mrs. Lee “told me it was impossible to wash yourself clean in it, because, in so much water, you could not make a strong suds. So when they fill it up and send her in there, she pretends, and makes a splashing noise. Then, when they are all asleep, she washes herself in a little wooden tub she keeps under her bed” (64). The nativist impulse of sanitarianism wedges itself between first and second generation immigrants here, as the children of immigrants impose the new cultural standards of sanitarianism on their elders. Going barefoot means
direct contact between body and environment, an act that cleansing or wearing shoes tries to contain.

Alexandra’s promotion of sanitarianism allows her to bridge the old and the new world. While she sympathizes with characters like Ivar and Mrs. Lee, she also wants to maintain peace with the Annie and Lou’s of the world. As her brothers urge her to put Ivar in an asylum, Alexandra considers buying a bath tub to ameliorate the situation. Regarding the tub, Alexandra tells Annie, “I might have one put in the barn for Ivar, if it will ease people’s minds” (69). Clearly the anxiety that surrounds the immigrant body and its potential to contaminate what surrounds it is ubiquitous. The response to this threat is standard: cleanse and contain, and if necessary, fake it. Both Mrs. Lee and Alexandra’s proposal of a tub for Ivar are attempts to project an outward appearance of cleanliness and assimilation into the new country.

Cather aligns the old world characters that are unable to assimilate, Ivar in particular, with nature. A Swede like the Bergsons, he can speak to Alexandra in their native tongue, but knows no English. He also seems able to speak to nature. As a kind of animal doctor, he uses unusual methods, and Alexandra remarks, “He understands animals” (23). He lives in harmony with the land, having “lived for three years in the clay bank, without defiling the face of nature any more than the coyote that had lived there before him had done” (24). While Alexandra appreciates Ivar’s knowledge, it is evident that his unusual character is derided by most, as his nickname “Crazy Ivar” suggests. Alexandra’s little brother Emil fears him, stating that if Ivar came after him on the prairie, he would “be too scared to run” (22).
Cather represents Ivar’s distance from modern civilization through his living space and actions. Cather writes, “He disliked the litter of human dwellings: the broken food, the bits of broken china, the old wash-boilers and tea-kettles thrown into the sunflower patch. He preferred the cleanness and tidiness of the wild sod. He always said that the badgers had cleaner houses than people, and that when he took a housekeeper her name would be Mrs. Badger” (25). This reverses expectations, as Ivar equates cleanliness with nature and dirtiness with civilization. Ivar’s idea of a housekeeper named “Mrs. Badger” demonstrates the intersecting ideas of sanitarianism and preservationism, leading to the question, where does purity really lie in this text? There seems to be purity in the landscape, which is consistent with earlier nineteenth-century texts and preservationism. On the other hand, the fact that Ivar is the character who sees this undermines the pure value ascribed to nature, because Ivar is a marginalized character.

Ivar and his community differ most on the question of nature’s commodification. Although his community finds value in the land once it becomes productive, granting it monetary value, Ivar sees the land as valuable regardless of its productivity. His land is a spiritual dwelling, as “his Bible seemed truer to him there” (25). His aversion to guns and the killing of wild game matches his anti-civilization stance. As the Bergsons pull up upon his lawn, he comes out of his hut yelling “no guns!” (26). He sees the soul in animals and tries to protect them. By seeing nature as having a value in itself, Ivar is a true preservationist.

For example, this nature-bound purity is evident in many transcendental texts, particularly Margaret Fuller’s Summer on the Lakes, in 1843.
His preservationism, however, does not make him part of the community, and Cather purposely juxtaposes his inability to assimilate with Alexandra’s capable assimilation. Ivar never learns to speak English. He mismanages his farm and has to be saved by Alexandra, who takes him in. He fears that he will be committed because he is different. Like Ivar, Cather aligns Alexandra with nature, but their respective connections to nature differ. Alexandra’s connection is capped by her desire to fulfill her father’s wishes and take care of her family economically. In other words, her will to survive and her desire to assimilate into American culture, particularly through her youngest brother Emil, cut the preservationism of the text short of fruition. Although O Pioneers! values wilderness, unlike preservationism it more values the transformation of wilderness into economically productive farms. In other words, wilderness is only valuable here for its transformative potential, for through this transformation, immigrant characters like Alexandra will begin to assimilate into American culture.

This transformation does not come easily, however. In the beginning of the novel, Cather describes the Bergson homestead for the first time, emphasizing the dominance of the land over civilization. She writes, “Of all the bewildering things about a new country, the absence of human landmarks is one of the most depressing and disheartening” (13). Most of the homes are “built of the sod itself, and were only the unescapable ground in another form” (13). Humans have barely made a mark here, as the roads and fields “were scarcely noticeable” (13). Agricultural attempts to tame the land do not seem to make a lasting impression. Cather writes, “In eleven long years John Bergson had made but little impression upon the wild land he had come to tame. It was
still a wild thing that had its ugly moods; and no one knew when they were likely to come, or why” (13-14). Here, Cather suggests that Bergson tames the land, but makes little “impression” upon it, which raises the question, what is the difference between “taming” and making a “lasting impression”? Cather states that the land is still a “wild thing” even in the face of Bergson’s taming, and the difference between the two terms is only one of time. John Bergson tames his plot temporarily, but his work will have no “lasting impression,” meaning that the wildness of the land will take over as soon as he stops, and that moment is upon him as he lies on his deathbed.

This does not seem to be merely a result of Bergson’s character, but more generally the power of nature over humanity, according to Cather. She writes, “The record of the plow was insignificant, like the feeble scratches on stone left by prehistoric races, so indeterminate that they may, after all, be only the markings of glaciers, and not a record of human strivings” (13). In this passage, Cather again undercuts ideas of civilization, suggesting that the prehistoric art we consider to be the mark of civilization might just as easily have been the mark of nature. She equates that prehistoric writing with the marking of the plow on the soil, perhaps upgrading the importance of agricultural work to the level of artful communication. In the long run, however, these forms are “indeterminate.” All things are temporally contingent here, and, out of context, the scratchings on stone and the soil not only lose their physical form, but also their cultural meaning, while the land lives on. The power of nature here reflects environmental preservationism, which also deems nature an all-powerful entity.
This idea of time contingency is interesting in relation to the nostalgia found in Cather’s project. As a regional text, *O Pioneers!* brings back a time that has been surpassed. Her resurrection of pioneer life into a novel, which freezes this historical moment for its readers, preserves this moment in textual form. Of course, this preservation is in tension with the idea of change and time that occur within the novel. The text spans a broad time period, and by part II of *O Pioneers!,* the land and its inhabitants have completely changed. At the beginning of the text, nature is unresponsive to the plow and the people who try to work it. Sixteen years later, however, the land gives itself up to those who work it. Cather describes the reformed landscape; “The Divide is now thickly populated. The rich soil yields heavy harvests; the dry, bracing climate and the smoothness of the land make labor easy for men and beasts” (51). This is hardly the land John Bergson encountered and made little “impression” upon. Cather emphasizes through the character of her younger brother, Emil, how easy it is to forget the changes that have occurred. As a five year old child at the beginning of the story, he remembers little of the untamed land: “The old wild country, the struggle in which his sister was destined to succeed while so many men broke their hearts and died, he can scarcely remember” (53). Cather, however, does seek to remember it. She preserves its history in her text much like the national parks attempt to preserve wilderness and American history in a state unaffected by time.

While Cather’s work memorializes the wild prairie, Alexandra has a transformative effect on the land. This transformation is exemplified by the order she imposes over her entire property. “When you go out of the house into the flower
garden,” Cather writes, “there you feel again the order and fine arrangement manifest all over the great farm; in the fencing and hedging, in the windbreaks and sheds, in the symmetrical pasture ponds, planted with scrub willows to give shade to the cattle in fly-time” (57). Cather highlights Alexandra’s control over nature with words like “order,” “arrangement,” “fencing and hedging,” and “symmetrical.” This is in contrast to the interior of the house, which is “unfinished and uneven” (56). This controlled nature reflects what Leo Marx calls the middle state, a garden-like medium between wild and civilized nature. Marx suggests that this “pastoral ideal” dominates American literature: “it is located in a middle ground somewhere ‘between,’ yet in a transcendent relation to, the opposing forces of civilization and nature” (23). However, I would add that it also displays the sanitarian impulse to control nature in the home, but the home has become the outdoors, displaying the confluence between Muir’s preservationism and sanitarianism. Like her efforts to “cleanse” Ivar by buying a bathtub, Alexandra sanitizes wild nature with technology – “windbreaks and sheds” – and by imposing order. Cather closes the passage stating, “You feel that, properly, Alexandra’s house is the big out-of-doors, and that it is in the soil that she expresses herself best” (57). Finally, her control of wild nature is an expression of selfhood, something that gets her closer to becoming American.56

Ironically, her capacity to control nature derives from her intimate connection and love for the land, and while Alexandra’s control over nature seems anti-environmental,

56 Alexandra’s execution of domestic preservationism makes her an unusual female character for the early twentieth century. By identifying Alexandra with wild nature, Cather makes Alexandra a more androgynous character, which seems almost consistent with the mixing of preservationism and sanitarianism which are gendered as masculine and feminine respectively.
her connection to nature resembles preservation. After her father’s death, while crossing the Divide, Alexandra is overwhelmed by her feelings toward nature. Cather writes,

> For the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her. Then the Genius of the Divide, the great, free spirit which breathes across it, must have bent lower than it ever bent to a human will before. The history of every country begins in the heart of a man or a woman. (44)

While looking at the land with “love and yearning,” Alexandra experiences the sublime and is overtaken with emotion. But nature yields to Alexandra, for it is “bent” to her “human will.” Later on, Alexandra contemplates the episode and finds personal strength through it:

> It fortified her [Alexandra] to reflect upon the great operations of nature, and when she thought of the law that lay behind them, she felt a sense of personal security. That night she had a new consciousness of the country, felt almost a new relation to it. Even her talk with the boys had not taken away the feeling that had overwhelmed her when she drove back to the Divide that afternoon. She had never known before how much the country meant to her. The chirping of the insects down in the long grass had been like the sweetest music. She had felt as if her heart were hiding down there, somewhere, with the quail and the plover and all the little wild things that crooned or buzzed in the sun. Under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring. (47)

In this passage Alexandra experiences regeneration from her experience on the divide. She feels that her “heart” is within the earth. This sounds strikingly similar to Muir’s preface to “Our National Parks,” where he writes, “In this book…I have done the best I could to show forth the beauty, grandeur, and all-embracing usefulness of our wild mountain forest reservations and parks, with a view to inciting the people to come and enjoy them, and get them into their hearts, that so at length their preservation and right
use might be made sure” (vii). While Muir wishes people to bring the mountains into their hearts, Cather goes a step further, suggesting that Alexandra’s heart is in the prairie. Despite her “home in nature,” it is debatable whether Alexandra ever truly assimilates into American culture. What is clear is that her younger brother, Emil, does. While not completely bound to nature like Ivar, Alexandra is also not completely free of the land like her brother Emil. Cather writes, “Out of her father’s children there was one who was fit to cope with the world, who had not been tied to the plow, and who had a personality apart from the soil. And that, she reflected, was what she had worked for” (142). She comments further that “on the outside Emil is just like an American boy” (79). In the end, Cather portrays Emil as the one character who fully assimilates into American culture, but this happens only because of his sister and the opportunity she provides for him. Alexandra bridges the old world and the new, and Cather generates her “bridge” status through Alexandra’s execution of sanitarianism and domestic preservationism.

III. ‘Now a Swamp in Name Only’: W.E.B. Du Bois and Preservationism

While W.E.B. Du Bois is perhaps best know as a sociologist who conceptualized African-American “double-consciousness,” critic Scott Hicks has recently suggested that Du Bois was an “environmentally conscious” author. In his first novel, The Quest of the Silver Fleece, Du Bois exhibits environmental awareness; however, his interest in the environment is bound to African-American assimilation. This southern plantation novel is typical of early twentieth-century regionalism, a genre that depicts nostalgia for rural life. Francesca Sawaya says most critics agree that African American literary regionalism “demonstrates an accession to white power and hegemony”; in contrast
Sawaya argues, “it seems reasonable that black authors would imagine that they could use the regionalist form both to counter the racist regionalism of white Southern writers and to authorize their own political voices” (73-74). In concordance with this idea, I argue that Du Bois adopts the regional, preservationist form in order to re-write the life of marginalized blacks during reconstruction. In this revision of history, African American characters, Zora and Bles, assimilate into the nation through their ability to tame a wild swamp and make it a productive cotton field.

Not uncommon for the period, the white characters of *Quest* equate blackness with filth. Mary Taylor describes her distaste for teaching African American children: “Here she was teaching dirty children, and the smell of confused odors and bodily perspiration was to her at times unbearable” (17). In this passage, the white teacher focuses on the body as the source of filth in her black students. Later, Mr. Bocombe suggests that black bodies indicate a degraded race: “Did you notice how unhealthy the children looked? Race is undoubtedly dying out; fact. No hope. Weak. No spontaneity either – rather languid, did you notice? Yes, and their heads – small and narrow – no brain capacity” (152-3). Following eugenic principals of head size and body language, Mr. Bocombe adheres to the commonly-held idea that those of African decent are a weak race about to die out.57

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57 In “W.E.B. DuBois, Anthropometric Science, and the Limits of Racial Uplift,” Maria Farland argues that Du Bois was very knowledgeable about “racialist brain science and biometrics” (1020). She maintains that he used his knowledge of biometrics to fight against it: “Adapting racialist concepts and categories, Du Bois transformed them almost unrecognizably, putting them to unanticipated use in a domestic fiction of racial uplift” (1020).
Even the protagonist, Zora, expresses concern over bodily contamination through contact. Du Bois writes, “‘Is it wrong,’ asked Zora, ‘to make believe you likes people when you don’t, when you’re afeared of them and thinks they may rub off and dirty you?’” (58). Zora speaks of Miss Taylor here, whose character she dislikes. Miss Taylor’s bad traits are figured as something that can “rub off” and “dirty you” like germs or mud. Hence, one’s essence, whether derived from one’s race or from one’s character, can be transferred through traces of the environment like dirt. The parameters of the body are not solid but porous. This shows that all of the characters, regardless of their race, have internalized this idea of a portal between the body and environment.

With the body as a source of contamination comes a fear over contact and infection, but the body is not the only source of infection, as the spaces that house such bodies are considered equally threatening. This is evident when Miss Taylor runs into the swamp and Harry Cresswell rushes after her to “save” her. He expresses his concern over the dangers in the swamp, which include, “Wandering Negroes, and even wild beasts, in the forest depths – and malaria” (176). Despite the obvious difference between “negroes,” “wild beasts,” and “malaria,” they are all placed in the same category here in relation to their potential to harm “pure” white characters. Thus, the source of malaria may not be the people who live in the swamp (it is the mosquitoes), but this place – the swamp – and all of its contents become interchangeable. In this metonymic relationship, the long term proximity between these three items and the swamp makes the “swamp” representative of everything else in the list.
Du Bois demonstrates this again with his animalistic description of Zora’s mother, Elspeth. He writes, “She was a horrible thing – filthy of breath, dirty, with dribbling mouth and red eyes. Her few long black teeth hung loosely like tusks and the folds of fat on her chin curled down on her great neck” (79). This depiction casts Elspeth as a devil with “red eyes” and animal-like “tusks.” Elspeth’s home reflects the animalistic filth of her body. Du Bois writes, “It was a single low, black room, smoke-shadowed and dirty, with two dingy beds and a gaping fire-place” (79). Du Bois projects the mother’s bodily characteristics onto her living space, generating a continuum of contamination between body and space. Du Bois suggests that Elspeth is unclean not only in body, but in mind as well. Unlike every other character in the novel, she is demonized. While Du Bois depicts most of the characters, even racist ones like Miss Taylor, with an element of sympathetic understanding, Elspeth’s lack of concern for her daughter’s well being and complicity in Zora’s molestation by the Cresswells is one thing for which Du Bois offers no defense. Like the sanitarianism of Ellen Richards, Du Bois connects Elspeth’s internal faults with external filth, at once bodily and spatial.

In accordance with a tradition that problematically equates black characters with nature, Du Bois’s African American character is labeled, “Zora, child of the swamp” (33). She is not of her mother, but of place, born out of the earth. She is “steeped body and soul in wood-lore” (33). The swamp stands in opposition to civilization. This is evident when Bles tells Zora, “you see, when you’re educated you won’t want to live in the swamp” (39). In a similar manner, Old Pappy and Zora’s mother, Elspeth, are also of the swamp. When Miss Taylor and Bles journey into the swamp, Old Pappy startles Miss
Taylor, “as a black man almost rose from the tangled earth at their side” (26). At the end of a quick conversation between the three characters, Pappy slips back into the swamp: “the swamp swallowed him” (27). This continuity between these African American characters and nature resembles the ideology of slavery, which aligned African Americans with nature in opposition to civilization, in order to justify their oppression.

In order to understand why, with such a problematic origin, Du Bois would repeat such a paradigm, we must further explore Zora’s connection to the swamp. The swamp is both mother and home to Zora. She is “of” it and belongs to it, knowing this place so well she can even anticipate its actions. Du Bois writes,

> the Swamp was calling its child with low, seductive voice. She knew where the first leaves were bursting, where tiny flowers nestled, and where young living things looked upward to the light and cried and crawled. A wistful longing was stealing into her heart. She wanted to be free. She wanted to run and dance and sing, but Bles wanted – . (56-7)

In this passage, Bles, in his desire to convert Zora, disrupts her desires to be home in the swamp. Zora associates the swamp with freedom, while Bles sees it as oppression. To Zora, this space is free from the rules of civilization. Du Bois paints Zora as an outcast in multiple ways, even in a school of black children. The swamp, however, is a place where she does fit in. Her connection to the swamp is one of belonging and love, for her desire to return to it is “a wistful longing…stealing into her heart.”

In addition to feeling at home in the swamp, Zora also sees the swamp as a place of “dreams,” implying it has transformative potential, opposed to a place of oppression. Zora, in particular, continually compares the swamp to a dream space. She explains to Bles, after finding the perfect location to grow the fleece in the swamp, that this spot is
“where the Dreams lives” (63). Dreams are part of the psyche and are therefore no place: they do not exist outside of the mind. Zora, however, does not think of them in this sense, always placing her dreams into the living material of the swamp. This may be her way of attempting to make her dreams come alive.

But her association between the swamp and a dream space is also interesting because swamps are traditionally considered unwanted and uninspiring spaces. Du Bois describes the swamp as “the gray and death-like wilderness darkened” (63). Referring to the swamp as a wilderness inverts the American literary tradition: while the swamp certainly matches some of the defining qualities of wilderness (non-human, isolated, ominous), it does not match others. Roderick Nash contends that “the initial image wilderness generally evokes is that of a forest primeval,” while eighteenth-century definitions tied wilderness to the desert (2-3). Although the swamp does not resemble the forest or the desert, it does have wilderness qualities in its lack of civilized development. The association of characters like Zora, Elspeth, and Old Pappy with the swamp undercuts their humanity, as wilderness is typically thought of as non-human. Du Bois does this to bring in the traditional equation between blackness and animalism only to undercut it later in the text through the civilizing of Zora. The definition of something like wilderness depends upon a system of value. That system can change over time, which is the central argument of Roderick Nash in his Wilderness and the American Mind. He claims, “for most of their history, Americans regarded wilderness as a moral and physical wasteland fit only for conquest and fructification in the name of progress, civilization, and Christianity,” although today wilderness has so much cultural value it is
championed by the public and protected by law (xv). Within the context of *Quest*, however, the swamp is a marginalized space, as are its inhabitants.  

Even in its marginality, however, the swamp is a place of dreams for Zora and Bles, and their positive figuration of the swamp is echoed by Du Bois, who represents the relationship between cotton and African Americans as potentially positive. Bles does not speak of cotton as a burden. When describing cotton to Miss Taylor, “His eyes lighted, for cotton was to him a very real and beautiful thing, and a life-long companion, yet not one whose friendship had been coarsened and killed by heavy toil. He leaned against his hoe and talked half dreamily – where had he learned so well that dream-talk” (20). Du Bois describes cotton as a friend to Bles. Later in the passage, however, Miss Taylor reminisces about the cotton as a thing, but a very powerful thing: “Now, for one little half-hour she had been a woman talking to a boy – no, not even that: she had been talking – just talking; there were no persons in the conversation, just things – one thing: Cotton” (21). To Miss Taylor the cotton overpowers the people who were conversing about it; the subject of cotton erases the differences between her and Bles, differences of race, age, and gender. But Bles and Miss Taylor see cotton differently: the former as a friend, the latter as an object. As Arlene Elder argues, Du Bois uses the “symbol of the fleece” to “reveal the close relationship Southern blacks feel with the soil and the difference between this kinship and the Plantation mentality’s emphasis upon property and profits”

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58 Buell remarks on the eventual conversion of swamps into ecologically valuable spaces. He writes, “This has been one of the most dramatic transformations of popular environmental values in the late twentieth-century United States: perhaps the most dramatic expansion in modern times of the nineteenth-century revaluation of wilderness from adversarial space, valued only in proportion to its capacity to be transformed into economic asset” (*Writing for an Endangered World* 259).
While it is true that Du Bois displays the “close relationship” between African Americans and nature, this relationship is not exactly separate from the “property and profits” of the plantation. After all, Zora and Bles plant cotton in the swamp to make money so she can attend school.

Nevertheless, the love and friendship both Zora and Bles feel toward the swamp resembles preservationism. Regarding the cotton they planted, Bles tells Zora, “we’ll just work it to the inch – just love it into life” (61). “Lov[ing] it into life” reflects Muir’s prescription for love for and dwelling in nature. Muir suggests that aside from its valuable resources, nature contains the “fountains of life” (1). Bles draws a parallel between work and love. While one may expect assimilation to require work, a love of nature is unexpected. Perhaps Du Bois appeals to preservation because it offers not only “American-ness,” but a seemingly more authentic, spiritual identity, and a bridge between slavery and modernity. In Quest, his depiction of the city is one of corruption and moral decay. Both Zora and Bles leave the city to return to the more redemptive, agricultural south.

However, redemption comes only through a transformation of the South and the characters. At the end of the novel, Zora stands completely transformed in comparison to her earlier self, when she appeared like a devil. When Zora enters Miss Smith’s schoolhouse for the first time, Du Bois writes,

The door opened softly, and upon the threshold stood Zora. Her small feet and slender ankles were black and bare; her dark, round, and broad-browed head and strangely beautiful face were poised almost defiantly, crowned with a misty mass of waveless hair, and lit by the velvet radiance of two wonderful eyes. And hanging from shoulder to ankle, in formless, clinging folds, blazed the scarlet gown. (41)
The red gown Bles bought for her symbolizes her diabolical qualities as the dress is “formless” and blazes like fire. This is in direct contrast to the white wedding dress made of the silver fleece that she wears later in the novel. Bles, of course, buys Zora the cotton gown to civilize her, knowing she will need a “presentable” dress to wear to school. Du Bois, however, undercuts this civilizing quality with Zora’s “defiance,” evident in her strange beauty, radiant eyes, and bare feet. Made of cotton, the dress foreshadows the conversions that are essential to the text: the conversion of cotton into commodity, the conversion of Zora from devil to angel, and the conversion of the swamp into the cotton field.

Transforming Zora into an angel proves difficult, for she is no longer a virgin. When Bles rejects Zora after finding out that she is not chaste, Zora cries out, “‘how can I grow pure?’” (145). The idea of “growing” pure, of course, goes against the very notion of chastity, which cannot be regained once it is lost. Bles tells her, “Never – never again,” because there is no way to turn back and reclaim her virginity (145). In the end, Zora “grows” pure by growing cotton. “Growing” pure calls upon the natural, even though the ideas and values behind purity here are undoubtedly cultural. “Growing pure” connects Zora to nature, but not in a way that debases her; rather it is in an attempt to elevate her social status. Zora needs to be remade and seeks regeneration through education and domestic preservation.

In Du Bois’s representation of domestic preservationism, Zora literally builds a home in the wilderness, except this wilderness is a swamp, rather than Muir’s mountains. When describing Zora’s swamp house, Du Bois writes, “The room was a unity; things
fitted together as if they belonged together. It was restful and beautiful, from the cheerful pine blaze before which Miss Smith was sitting, to the square-paned window that let in the crimson rays of gathering night” (347-8). Her home is ordered and unified, displaying peaceful balance between nature and civilization as the “crimson rays of gathering night” shine into the house through the window, bringing the outdoors inside. Du Bois depicts the house as a place of rejuvenation, like Muir described, with the home’s “restful” and “cheerful” qualities. The house is only one step toward making this “home” in the wilderness.

The transformation of the swamp to a cotton field is the final step, completing the conversions necessary for assimilation. Following the prescriptions of preservationism, the transformation of the swamp into cotton happens because Zora and Bles “love it into life,” and they dwell in nature. Du Bois figures the work they do while dwelling in the swamp as mutually constructive: “So it was the Fleece rose and spread and grew to its wonderful flowering; and so these two children grew with it into theirs” (107). As the fleece grows, Zora and Bles grow too; the children “flower” because of the fleece, and the fleece flowers because of them. When heavy rains come and threaten to destroy the crop, Zora works tirelessly to save it, thereby saving herself. By the end of the novel, the meaning of this conversion is made clear. Du Bois writes, “It was Spring again, and Zora sat in the transformed swamp – now a swamp in name only – beneath the great oak, dreaming” (371). While this space maintains its original name, it is no longer a swamp. Thus referring to this space as a “swamp” is an example of metonymy. Unlike metaphor, which is based on similarity, metonymy is based on contiguity. Cotton fields and swamps
are not alike, but there is contiguity between this particular newly formed cotton field and a swamp. Only the space’s history connects it to this name and only those who witness its conversion understand its original name. Bles and Zora generate this conversion, and the fact that they are witnesses and agents of this conversion, creators of this metonymy, suggests that they have not only worked themselves into the land, but they have also worked themselves into history, thereby becoming American.

It is difficult to determine whether Zora and Bles really do assimilate into American culture. Arlene Elder argues, “What Zora learned in the North was the necessity of maintaining in her people the best values of the Swamp – their honesty, joy, and reverence of the land – while infusing them with cleverness and ambition, the best aspects of the Plantation” (365). Elder suggests that the fusion of both worlds seems to be best. I would like to point out that if Zora does successfully fuse her two worlds and two selves, it is through a preservationist model. Du Bois seems unwilling to leave the agricultural South for the Northern city, even though many blacks did during reconstruction. Du Bois’s interest in nature may be the reason he looks for redemption in the country, but with the South hostile and oppressive to blacks, it is only through transformation that the South can be reclaimed.

As Du Bois’s characters demonstrate, this domesticated form of preservationism is a bridge between old world and new, wild nature and civilization. Many critics mistakenly limit its “bridging” capabilities to the idea of time, suggesting that preservationism is merely an attempt to preserve the past in the face of industrialization. However, the preservationist model offers much more than that. If certain spaces are
emblems of “America,” then dwelling in the right spaces might enable an individual to become “American.” Nature can purify the human, but only if it is considered a pure space. Zora and Bles employ domestic preservationism in order to grow pure, purifying nature as nature purifies them. By making both Zora and the swamp productive, Du Bois converts two entities that lack value in American society to valuable status. But it is the yoking of Zora with the swamp in both their original and converted state that reveals the mutual constructions of space and race. African Americans were typically associated with wild nature. Du Bois describes the swamp, “Silently and dismally the half-dead forest, with its ghostly moss, lowered and darkened, and the black waters spread into a great silent lake of slimy ooze” (63). Du Bois persistently comments on the blackness of the swamp, a quality clearly equating the African American characters with this particular space. The swamp’s blackness seems all encompassing and pervasive, inescapable. Whites, by contrast, are connected to cultivated nature. For example, when Miss Taylor sees the Cresswell house for the first time, she responds, “Oh, this was life: a smooth green lawn, and beds of flowers, a vista of brown fields, and the dark line of wood beyond” (90). The borders of the “lawn,” “beds,” “fields,” and “wood” are distinct and well organized. There is an expansive view and feeling of order, beauty, and freedom around the Cresswell house. This contrasts the darkness of the swamp and its lack of strict borders. The swamp defies organization and borders with its “ghostly moss,” “black waters” that “spread,” and its “slimy ooze.” These elements are ominous and threaten through their movement. While the parallel between marginalized spaces
and marginalized races are often seen as a mode of geographic determinism, Du Bois finds power in the swamp’s transgressions.

In the end, Zora and Bles possess a cotton field, but like the swamp, the cotton field is traditionally associated with the oppression of blacks, and furthermore it marks the destruction of wild nature. Thus, it is questionable if Zora and Bles every truly transcend their situation, and it is even more questionable if Du Bois’s interest in environment can possibly exceed his interest in race. Nevertheless, Cather’s *O Pioneers!* and Du Bois’s *Quest* demonstrate that environmental preservationism, and particularly the principles of loving and dwelling in nature, became a mode for the marginalized to become American. The elements of preservationism seen in *O Pioneers!* and *The Quest of the Silver Fleece* do not really lead to an environmental agenda, as much as they provide a potential avenue for becoming American. This is significant for multiple reasons. First, preservationism is often criticized for being elitist, but obviously here it opens itself up to the marginalized other, perhaps in ways which its forefathers never intended. Second, people of color, particularly African Americans and immigrants, are often severed from our environmental history, but these texts suggest that environmental ideas were well disseminated, mixed with the ideology of sanitarianism, and entrenched in national rhetoric. Finally, while preservationism transforms value, making something valueless valuable, it also reveals how space and race can be mutually constructed.

The mutual construction of space and race can empower or oppress marginalized races, as well as marginalized spaces. Du Bois and Cather suggest that there is a way to “grow pure” and become American via an environmental model. However, growing pure
is contingent upon a myth of spatial and racial purity, and while these characters move
toward assimilation, the cultural construction of spatial purity remains intact. An
idealized environmental purity breeds fear over contamination, and while that fear may
be justly motivated, it can also be unjustly motivated, resulting in biases over the
communities we choose to advocate for and the parts of nature we choose to protect.
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